

THE HONEYSUCKLE



BY GABRIELE
D'ANNUNZIO

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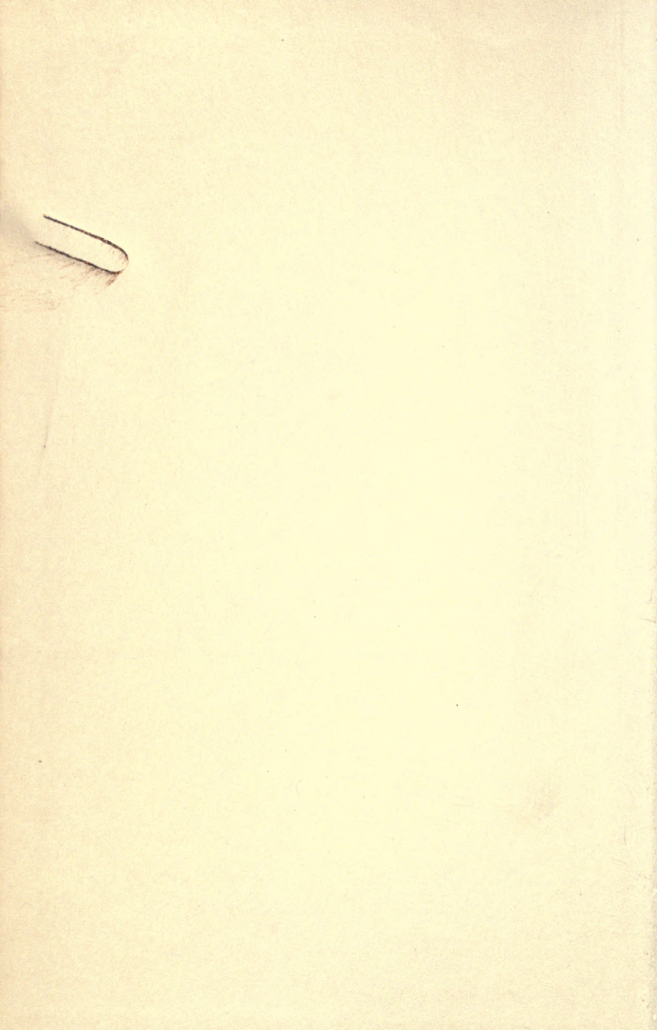


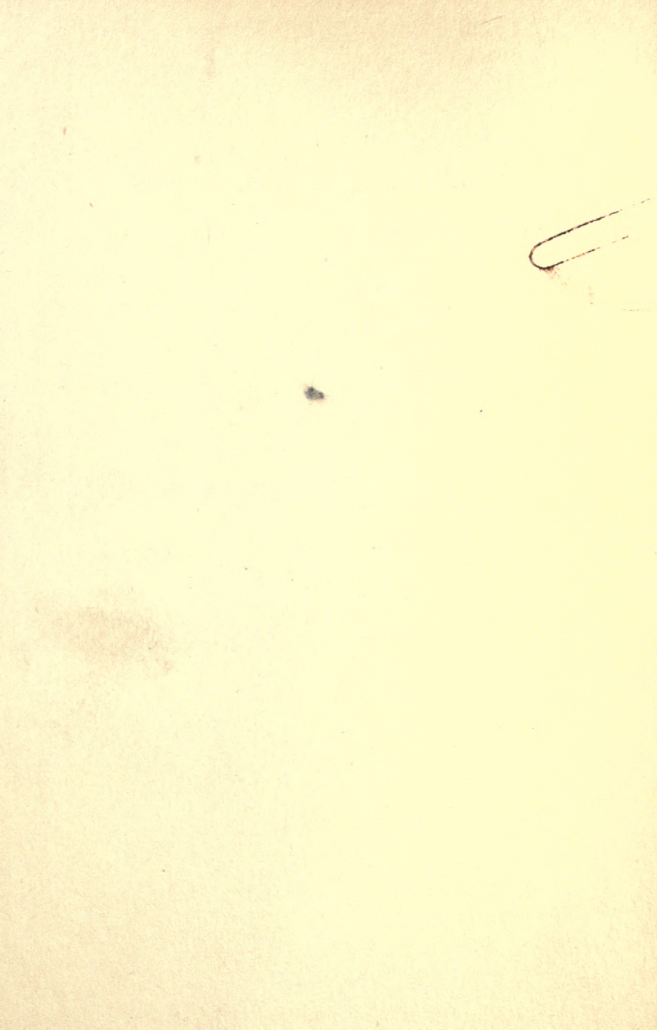
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THE HONERSUCKLE

THE HONEYSUCKLE

A PLAY

In Three Acts

BY GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

Translated by CECILE SARTORIS and
GABRIELLE ENTHOVEN

"Gotelef," l'apelent Engleis

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PIERRE DAGON

IVAIN DE LA COLDRE

LAURENCE DAGON

HELISSANT DE LA COLDRE

AUDE

THE SWALLOW

TWO SERVANTS

THE HONEYSUCKLE

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *In an old pleasure-house, built in the Italian style, in a land of olive trees, not far from the Western Mediterranean, stands a sort of round hall which reminds one singularly of that designed by Raphael for Giulio de' Medici on the Monti Mario. It consists of two lateral apses, with pilasters, columns, empty niches, grotesques, and a coffered ceiling, united by the architrave of a vast rectangular bay opening on a vestibule with three arches on the garden side. Beneath each semi-dome is a frieze of painted stucco, developing the emblematic subjects of the hazel and the honeysuckle, as expressed in the ancient lay of Marie de France:*

“D'els dous fu il tut altresì
cume del chevrefueil esteit
ki a la coldre se perneit . . .”

Amidst the entwining of the hazel and honeysuckle winds a riband upon which can still be traced the motto of the harpist knight of Brittany :

“Bele amie, si est de nus

Ne vus senz mei, ne jco senz vus.”

In the middle of each hemicycle is an ornate door ; and in the centre of the diameter, on the left, erected on a pedestal of the Tuscan order, stands a statue of “Abundance” after the manner of Jean Goujon, whilst on the right a similar base supports the worn torso of a draped Muse.

In the background, behind the laurels growing in boxes against the pilasters, is a square garden with symmetrical divisions edged with box. This is enclosed by a high, sombre hornbeam hedge, uniformly trimmed. Before the portico is an extinct fountain in the form of a wherry supported by the bodies of four sea-horses.

It is an unsettled afternoon at the end of April. The patter of a shower on the trellis and balustrades abates, then dies away. The gleaming of the sun on the summit of the verdant walls is like a heavy gilding on massive bronze. The fragrance of the arbours comes in waves ; for rain-washed honey-

suckle blooms in this demesne, which bears its name, in remembrance of the great love of Hardré de la Coldre and the beautiful Roman, Isotta Orsini.

AUDE is alone, standing, pensive, anxious. On hearing a clear voice call her from outside, she starts and turns round. Light and vivacious as a bird, a young girl runs up the steps of the porch and crosses the vestibule, breathless, laughing, clad in white and raven-black exquisitely.

VOICE.

Aude! Aude! Are you there?

AUDE.

Oh! The Swallow! [*She goes towards her, all radiant.*] From whence do you hail, Clariel? Come in, come in!

THE SWALLOW.

I am out of breath. Do not kiss me; you will get wet. I am all drenched.

AUDE.

Let me see. No, not so bad as all that.

THE SWALLOW.

What a shower! It caught me at the gate; and in spite of my flitting from arbour to arbour, from bower to bower . . .

AUDE.

How exquisitely cool you are! Fragrant from the shower, you smell of lilies of the valley, box and honeysuckle. And your heart throbs in your throat, sweet little sister bird. Recover your breath! Come, perch up here.

THE SWALLOW.

Oh! I cannot. I came only for an instant, just to glance at myself in your eyes. You know, Herbert stayed down below by the clump of hazel trees.

AUDE.

Herbert has arrived?

THE SWALLOW.

Yes, this morning.

AUDE.

That is why you scintillate with gladness. You are

more Clariel than ever. It seems as if you would slip through my hands. But I hold you by the wings.

[She holds her by the shoulders, almost shaking her.]

THE SWALLOW.

No, Audain. Let me go!

AUDE.

But it is still showery up there! While he is waiting, Herbert, like all the others, will cut from a dripping hazel tree the famous branch, strip it, scantle it, and engrave your two names entwined. He needs time for that. Oh, Clariel, you blush up to your hidden ears!

THE SWALLOW.

How could you guess, Audain?

[She blushes, laughing.]

AUDE.

It is not very difficult. You look exactly like a mischievous little Isolde who has just demanded some small work of patience from her well-trained little Tristan.

[Amused, delighted, the visitor laughs, raising her throat like a bird whilst drinking.]

THE SWALLOW.

It is true. I taught him the lesson—"All lovers who enter into the dominion of the Honeysuckle must fulfil the ritual of fidelity." I assure you, I told him most faithfully the history of your noble ancestor, Hardré de la Coldre, and of Isotta Orsini, the Roman. So, now I shall go back and find the wand entwined with a spray of honeysuckle as on the road to the White Heath.

"Bele amie, si est de nus
Ne vus senz mei, ne jeo senz vus."

AUDE.

You are happy? You are happy?

*[She speaks to her in a low tone, her voice altered
and with a sort of sudden fierceness, which
dies out immediately.]*

THE SWALLOW,

Audain! Audain!

AUDE.

You are happy? The blood in your face is as transparent as when you gaze at a hand against the sun,

THE SWALLOW.

How beautiful you are, Audain! I have never seen you look like that.

AUDE.

How can you say that, flattering little swallow?

THE SWALLOW.

It is the light, perhaps. To-day there is another light; do you not see? As though all were changing. Now I notice that your eyebrows are thicker. They are almost joined together. How serious you have become, eaglet! You look now as though you wanted to cry.

AUDE.

I want to go away, to go away!

THE SWALLOW.

Already?

AUDE.

Where will you go with your betrothed this evening?

THE SWALLOW.

Alas, not far!

[She sighs and turns towards the sunlit garden.]

AUDE.

I would wish to bare my feet and go alone by certain pathways I have not revisited, to walk beside a hedge upon which is drying the linen of the poor, to soothe some wandering waif gone astray, to listen to the cracked tinkling of bells, to the shriek of a passing train, to the cries of sea-birds that come soaring up the river. I would wish no longer to remember my name, to stop at a farm door and beg a glass of water from some old woman just lighting a lamp, and then to fall a little farther away, with my face against the earth.

THE SWALLOW.

"Las! Merencolia!" as our poet, Charles d'Orléans, would say. Why, Audain? And I thought you were so glad to be back after these three years in this "Peaceful Dwelling of the Honeysuckle!"

AUDE.

You are little, Clariel. You are a very little

swallow, all white and black. Your little heart is all bursting with the spring. You breathe as in a fairy tale. You do not understand. I speak of life!

THE SWALLOW.

Oh!

AUDE.

During these three years I have changed so intensely that it seems to me almost as though I had another person's blood in my veins. And you, you are absolutely unchanged, and yet I hardly recognize you.

THE SWALLOW.

Really!

AUDE.

You cannot understand me, Clariel.

THE SWALLOW.

I am really more gosling than swallow. I admit that. And then, I think you have told me so, pretty clearly. And so you are not glad to be here, now that the old dwelling is restored to "They of La Coldre," to know that the house where you

were born and where your father died is no longer in the hands of strangers, so that in it you can re-live your memories, our memories—Audain?

AUDE.

Ours? . . . Do you remember that picture of Jesus that poor Miss Turner used to show us? It had eyes that seemed closed first of all, and filled with shadows; then little by little they opened, one knew not how, and fixed us with a gaze we could not bear. Each time you used to turn away, shivering and screaming with fear.

THE SWALLOW.

It is true. I remember.

AUDE.

Here, I find again dark memories that seem to open their eyes in the same fashion, and I feel then as if I had something to cry aloud.

THE SWALLOW.

How strange you are!

[*She seems a little afraid,*

AUDE.

In the same way the doors and windows here open, as if some one were expected. The curtains sway, the furniture creaks, and in each corner something is straining—preparing.

THE SWALLOW,

From whence does that voice come to you?

AUDE.

Perhaps I have a voice in me, a voice that is not my own. Do I recognize it? But every word, in a different voice, has a different significance, weight and destiny. Do you not know that "The Peaceful Dwelling of the Honeysuckle" was bought again for love of a voice? My sister-in-law decided to purchase it because my brother dreamed continually of that old Italian organ from Bergamo here in the chapel, that terrible consoler of his youth. It was his great passion. Do you remember when we both hid in the confessional to listen to him playing fugues, motets and chorals of Frescobaldi, for hours and hours?

THE SWALLOW.

I remember, Sometimes we used to shiver like

paupers. We felt the cold at the nape of our necks, I do not know why, as in the wind from the mountains. The stained-glass windows seemed to us to be cut out of blue ice.

AUDE.

You know that my father is buried there under the tribune.

THE SWALLOW.

God rest his soul!

AUDE.

The day we came back here, after all the sad things that you know and that you do not know, Ivain could no longer restrain his impatience. Old Dominique walked in front of us, opening the doors. We went too quickly to look at anything, but we recognized each room by its peculiar smell, its flooring, the colder or softer atmosphere, a threshold, a step. When we went into the chapel, I knelt down upon the stone, but Ivain at once climbed into the organ-loft. I heard the wood creak overhead, the bellows snort, the registers squeak, and the anguish of my heart was so great because I did not know whether the voice would come from above or from beneath the earth. Time seemed to stand still. I

wanted to cry out, "Speak! Speak!" Oh, I cannot tell you. Surely my brother was suffocating up there, his fingers trembling. Then suddenly the silence was rent. It was not the voice we were waiting for, but another!

The soul of the organ, too, was shattered, and escaped distraught, obedient no longer. I sobbed, alone, on the stone. I heard my brother sobbing up above, over the keys, and there was nothing left but the stones upon which so many tears had already been shed.

THE SWALLOW.

Aude, Aude, how sad you are! Almost sadder than when you went away. What is the matter with you? What is the matter with you? It will pass. Is it true that you expect your mother—that you are to be reconciled to her, and to her husband? Forgive me for asking you this!

AUDE.

Invain wishes it . . . I believe. I do not know.

[Her brow darkens and she frowns for an instant.

I have but one desire: to follow a path, any path that will lead me somewhere where . . .

THE SWALLOW.

Where your heart would go before you and say,
"Come with me!" Oh, say it, own it, Audain! Do
you feel like this because as the rondeau says: "In
love is there aught but torture?"

AUDE.

You are mad, Clariel.

THE SWALLOW.

You will not tell me? Perhaps you have left
some one—over there. Is that what you are grieving
about? Tell me, is that really your trouble?

AUDE.

What madness!

THE SWALLOW.

Truly, you do not love? You have never loved
since last I saw you? Tell me, confess to me!

AUDE.

What is love? Tell me, I do not know.

THE SWALLOW.

Is there anything else in the world? But you know all about it. At least, you saw the dawn of Ivain and Helissent's love. You see it each day, here, before your eyes.

AUDE.

One does not see clearly what is too close to one's eyes. And then, Helissent . . .

THE SWALLOW.

Helissent . . .

AUDE.

She was born at night. She is so reserved that near her one becomes disheartened, as in front of a sham door which has no locks or hinges. It seems to me as if she were always preceded by her shadow—as if the only radiance she emitted emanated from her dazzling shoulders. And I have the feeling that through that palpable shadow she probes me every time, before she stretches out her hand to me. One knows nothing. When she comes in, it is as though she had just left the wax figure of an incantation, the threads of a conspiracy, some perilous game, or else some alchemic research. Do you like Helissent?

THE SWALLOW.

I cannot imagine her otherwise than beneath a Venetian domino. Her long, narrow eyes observe and spy as from behind a mask of white satin.

AUDE.

And the most wonderful thing of all is, that one does not know whether under the domino she is hiding a weapon of death, a burning wound, or Aladdin's lamp.

THE SWALLOW.

And if she were hiding all three?

AUDE.

It would be still more wonderful.

THE SWALLOW.

But you like each other?

AUDE.

Very much. She charms and spoils me.

THE SWALLOW.

Aude, let me go now. Herbert is waiting for me.

[Her friend holds her back in a mysterious manner, with a gentleness almost oppressive, and a smile sharpening into raillery.]

AUDE.

* He waits for you at the fountain of The Truth of Love, or in the lair of Old Mandrague, or under the trellis of Gloriande. These forsaken gardens must be welcome to those who love. You have not yet told me what love is. You must tell me, Clariel, you who know. Herbert will stay there. He will not go away; he is finishing his task with his little knife; then he will wind the honeysuckle around the carved wand. Just now you were talking to me, yet listening only for him. It almost seems as if you could feel him with your cheek that is turned towards the garden. The whole of your soul is on that half of your face. You are like those smooth peaches of Stanwick, you know, those nectarines, as Miss Turner used to call them, which of their own accord break in two. You feel him with this cheek and this shoulder, and your

heart beats on the right side, now. Are you blushing, or is it the light?

THE SWALLOW.

Audain!

[She is suffused with blushes, and, with a shame-faced grace, seizes the hand of her companion and presses it against her cheek.]

AUDE.

Tell me what it is, Clariel.

THE SWALLOW.

I will tell you.

[She lingers, musing.]

AUDE.

Well?

THE SWALLOW.

I will tell you.

[She searches for words, adorably abashed, like a schoolgirl before the examiner.]

AUDE.

Now you have a face like a rose,

THE SWALLOW.

Ah! listen. I awake and feel that my face is made of a rose, and that the dawn is scarcely less new than myself.

AUDE.

And then?

THE SWALLOW.

Then I sit on the bed, and I stay there properly, as at the beginning of a made-up story. And the mere thought that the days have lengthened by five hours fills me with the exhilaration of never dying, and it seems to me that my life is slipping away, I know not where, and that another life, more precious, is flowing continuously towards me, from I know not whence; and that my soul is changing into another soul that is more mine than mine own; and I crave, I crave something and I know not what, and I have no savour in my mouth, yet I feel I have in me a fragrance far more exquisite than the fragrance of the air and of all things that are good in the world. . . .

[She breaks off and closes her eyes in childish bewilderment.]

AUDE.

And then?

THE SWALLOW.

Then . . . [*And quickly she murmurs*] I kiss my arms.

AUDE.

Little sweet! But there must be still another sort of love?

[*HELISSANT DE LA COLDRE bursts in like a whirlwind.*]

HELISSANT.

Ha, ha! Are you two discoursing upon love?

[*The two girls begin to laugh as if in a happy mood.*]

THE SWALLOW.

It is Aude! She is putting me through an examination, and proceeds by distinctions.

AUDE.

Learn, then, sister-in-law, that not only is the swallow a blushing love "in scarlet clad from cap to toe," as in the saying of Bertrande Baleste, known as Le Milhoun, but that shortly she will build her nest elsewhere and the very fair swain awaits her

below near the clump of hazel trees, where, naturally, he is working on the famous wand with "the knife of Jeannot."

THE SWALLOW.

It is not true. She is jesting. Do not believe it.

[She laughs and reddens, attempting gracefully to close the mocking lips of her companion.]

HELISSANT.

And yet the sky is rose-coloured, and so are you.

THE SWALLOW.

What is awaiting me, alas! beyond the shower, is the maternal storm. I am off on the wing of the wind. Farewell! Farewell!

[Lightsome and fleet, THE SWALLOW crosses the vestibule, runs down the steps, turning her pretty face as she retreats.]

AUDE.

Come back quickly, Clariel.

THE SWALLOW,

Farewell !

[The two sisters-in-law follow her with their gaze into the maze of box.]

HELISSANT.

Good-bye !

[The sky is all rose-coloured above the hedge of hornbeam. One can see through the thick foliage the glow in the western sky.]

What a fresh little creature ! She almost seems to have wings ! When she turned her head, would one not have said she had in the corner of her lips a thread of joy, as a bird carries in its beak a straw or a wisp of white flax ?

[HELISSANT puts one arm round AUDE'S waist. AUDE still looks in the direction her friend took, and lifts her hand as if she caught sight of her at the end of the terrace and greeted her anew.]

AUDE.

Happiness ! Happiness !

[She sighs that word almost in her heart as if poised on the border of the imaginary land where CLARIEL is about to live out her fairy tale.

[HELISSANT calls her, as if she wished to say something solemn to her, and hesitates.

HELISSANT.

Aude . . .

AUDE.

I have never felt the spring as I feel it this year. And you, Helissant? It is perhaps the renewed flowering of the honeysuckle manifesting itself in the untamed creature I used to be. . . . In the morning, when I stretch myself, half asleep, I feel as if one of my arms were as long as a stone staircase, the other like a lane of yew trees, and that in one hand, far away, I hold a goddess clad in moss, and in the other a basin filled with water-lilies.

HELISSANT.

Aude . . .

AUDE.

Only think; the days have lengthened by five

hours, and in a few weeks the daylight will last until nine o'clock. Look at the colouring of the sky. It is too lovely. Now the day breaks suddenly and falls like a mellow fruit at Clariel's feet : she picks it up, bites into it, and leaves the other half for . . .

HELISSANT.

Listen, Aude. I must tell you. Your mother is here.

[The dreamer starts and disengages herself from the arms of her sister-in-law, unable to control her emotion.]

AUDE.

What do you say ? Who is here ?

HELISSANT.

Your mother.

AUDE.

My mother ?

HELISSANT.

Yes.

AUDE.

She has come ! When ?

HELISSANT.

This instant.

AUDE.

Without giving us warning.

HELISSANT.

I imagine it is a surprise contrived by Ivain to precipitate events. I know he went to meet her at La Brouste, and brought her back himself.

AUDE.

Is she alone?

HELISSANT.

I hardly think so.

AUDE.

With that man?

HELISSANT.

I have not seen either of them. Ivain came up to fetch me. His anguish was such that I felt sorry for him. You know how easily he becomes distracted when he is faced by the inevitable. He begged me to come and tell you.

AUDE.

But Monsieur Dagon ?

HELISSANT.

I could not quite gather. Ivain avoided all questions and stammered. But it is most probable Monsieur Dagon has come too, because, for your mother, the important point is to be received here with her husband.

AUDE.

And you think he is already in the house ?

HELISSANT.

If he is not already here, he cannot be far away. It will not be long before we know. It is a surprise, I tell you. Your mother, by arrangement with Ivain, comes in person to plead her cause, to force our assent.

AUDE.

But it is incredible.

HELISSANT.

It was to be expected. Your brother cannot live

longer, separated from her. He is like a child not yet weaned. For some time past he has done nothing but sigh and moan. You know it well. And now that the ruins are being repaired and the old hearth rekindled, it seems to both of them that the hour for re-establishing the sanctity of family ties has dawned at last.

AUDE.

And you consent? It is with your fortune that all is being done. Are you not the mistress here?

HELISSENT.

That is somewhat crudely put, Aude. A stranger rather.

AUDE.

My presentiment was mistaken, perhaps? It never is mistaken. I had left my heart here, my heart in mourning, and my real life; but truly, I never wished to come and find them again, for fear of sinning sooner or later against both. The ashes that are so dear to me will not bear being disturbed. That is why I did not ask you. I did not urge you to give us back these walls, raised seemingly but to receive a merciless guest. The greatest atrocity had already

been endured, the past had already assumed its obdurate aspect, and the enigma had remained buried in the stone.

HELISSANT.

But, Aude, your brother thought of nothing else. I knew that the repurchase was a tacit convention in the marriage contract, that it was more than a desire, more than a promise. And you know it. You were speaking a moment ago of your awakening to the vision of arches and marble basins. Ivain, who is only a beautiful child, born of music, seemed to have left all his resonance here, and to be capable only of finding it again in this, his birthplace, where he attuned his dreams to the notes of his organ. For all you de la Coldres this domain is a sort of mysterious inheritance, I know not what, almost an emblem of your destinies. In bringing Ivain home I had the impression of restoring him to himself. And added to my compliance was some unknown desire for novelty, and an unknown hope of refreshing my love and of seeing that child become still more beautiful. Do you understand?

AUDE.

I understand. But it is no longer sufficient to be

beautiful. Can you imagine, Helissent, that I reproach you with your generosity? Why, you also gave me back to myself. The time passed elsewhere, after my father's death, after our ruin, after that dreadful incident, seems to me to-day featureless, like some worn effigy that I have never known and could not recognize. If I had not come back, perhaps I would have gone into a convent, but I am here, as if I had taken the veil, pronounced my vows. Never have I felt so absolutely alone, nor so absolutely alive. In the cloister I should have been alone with my God; here I am alone with a great memory. It is my memory that creates my religious life. And not only do I remember, but some one in me remembers. We are two that live and remember together.

HELISSANT.

You dishearten me. Life is made of forgetfulness.

AUDE.

It is not true.

HELISSANT.

You have a passion for suffering—for tormenting yourself.

AUDE.

No. Is it my fault if the keeping of a sorrow has been entrusted to me, a wound to bear in my breast?

HELISSANT.

Let us cure you.

AUDE.

By what? My blood and my tears are waiting.

HELISSANT.

By life itself, by the unexpected, by the unknown.

AUDE.

By the one who will cross this threshold?

HELISSANT.

Who knows? One must continually offer oneself to one's destiny.

AUDE.

I press mine close to me to smother it,

HELISSENT.

Two arms are not sufficient,

AUDE.

But one heart is.

HELISSENT.

To bleed.

AUDE.

I can let mine bleed a long time before the last drop oozes from it.

HELISSENT.

Aude, you are ill with the springtime. I know that illness.

AUDE.

My illness is of a season unknown to you, Helissent.

HELISSENT.

You do not know yourself what you mean or what you want.

AUDE.

I want to go away.

HELISSANT.

But what folly !

AUDE.

I will not stay here.

HELISSANT.

At least, wait. We shall see.

AUDE.

See, see ! That is just what I will not do.

HELISSANT.

But why ?

AUDE.

Do you not feel ? It seems as if the whole house is holding its breath. It no longer breathes. You do not feel it ? And this evening its soul born once more cannot commune in the softness of the lamp-light ; it must stay in the shadowed corners. Helissant, Helissant, I leave you the guest. I leave him to you and to my brother, who knows forgetfulness. As for me, I am going away. To-night I shall seek shelter with the Swallow. Then I shall follow my vocation.

HELISSANT.

What do you want to do, Aude? Can I do nothing for you?

AUDE.

Should you know how to fall, with your face to the earth?

HELISSANT.

Really, you seem beyond yourself.

AUDE.

It is true. Beyond myself and beyond all things.

HELISSANT.

But, at least, speak. What do you know?

AUDE.

I know nothing, and I divine all.

HELISSANT.

Whence comes this implacable rancour?

AUDE.

Ask the coming guest.

HELISSANT.

I only once saw your mother, at church, on the day of my wedding. But I have never seen that man.

AUDE.

You will see him.

HELISSANT.

Was he not your father's best friend?

AUDE.

So much so that he only married the widow to keep of the dead a living remembrance.

HELISSANT.

You are too hard. You do not forgive him for having consoled her?

AUDE.

Do you not feel that that word severs life? *You* are more cruel than *I* am hard.

HELISSANT.

But what is he like?

AUDE.

Gentle.

[She says this with a secret accent of irony, repulsion and mystery. Now, the sisters-in-law have drawn nearer one another, speak in lowered tones, in a contrast of confidence and defiance, with some hesitation before certain questions, certain answers with obscure meanings, sudden heart-beatings, almost violent glances quickly suppressed under the cautious eyelids.]

HELISSANT.

How?

AUDE.

Gentle as one who meditates too much and does wrong only to tempt himself so as to become some one else.

HELISSANT.

I know that sort.

AUDE.

He seemed above all things, and capable of all things.

HELISSANT.

Even great ?

AUDE.

Perhaps. He is a weaver of dreams.

HELISSANT.

He gave you some.

AUDE.

He knew how to disarm force and quell it.

HELISSANT.

With magnetic hands ?

AUDE.

With the hands of a woman.

HELISSANT.

Beautiful ?

AUDE.

With a poisoner's hands.

HELISSANT.

Ah ! [*A brief pause.*] What are they like ?

AUDE.

Have you ever noticed that engraving I have in my room ?

HELISSANT.

Which one ?

AUDE.

The one in which the Duchess of Bisceglia is washing her hands.

HELISSANT.

I do not remember it.

AUDE.

Her arms bared to the elbow, she is washing her hands in a copper bowl, after having prepared the potion for Alfonso. Behind her head one sees reflected in a round mirror the sick husband, too young, too frail, too beautiful, like Ivain, who is made to walk on crutches so as to hasten the effect of the poison.

HELISSANT.

Aude, how strange you are !

AUDE.

I imagine I have seen in the depth of another

mirror those other two hands, as dexterous and as pale, emerging from the turned-back sleeves, washing in a basin, with the same gesture.

HELISSANT.

You frighten me, Aude. You are too strange.

AUDE.

It is a dream I have dreamt.

HELISSANT.

The more I look at you, the more unfathomable you seem.

AUDE.

Yet I am far clearer than you.

HELISSANT.

But perhaps less distant from me than I am from myself.

AUDE.

You, you are a woman.

HELISSANT.

You, you wear the veil.

AUDE.

The past is my cloister.

HELISSANT.

When I was a girl I was a sort of foolish child, shaken and terrified by dreams, and my belief was that from one dream alone one could suddenly fall ill and die.

AUDE.

My dream does not move from the depth of this mirror of which I have spoken.

HELISSANT.

And where is this mirror?

AUDE.

At the end of the glass-panelled gallery, on the chimney-piece, in the yellow drawing-room opposite the door giving into the adjoining room, in which is a deserted bed, between a low bookcase and a worn faldstool, that creak when one opens the shutters of the curtainless windows.

[She has spoken in a subdued tone, scarcely audible, gazing straight before her.]

HELISSANT.

So speak seers.

AUDE.

I really do see.

HELISSANT.

You seem ill, my sweet.

AUDE.

I am not sweet. Why do you caress me in this way ?

HELISSANT.

You fill me with compassion. Wait, let me put my hand through your hair to find your suffering.

AUDE.

Look, I let my hands drop by the side of my dress. Do you see ?

HELISSANT.

You mistrust me. You hate me, perhaps. I feel it. But I love you, and I am sad at the thought of your unhappiness, little sister.

AUDE.

If you were ever to discover my wound, I think it

would please you to dig your pink nails into it, so as to hurt me.

HELISSANT.

You think so.

AUDE.

I feel you to be alert, tense, your nostrils quivering as if you were breathing in the air that bitter fragrance you must love.

HELISSANT.

The same bitter fragrance is here in every alley.

AUDE.

The fragrance of present and past tears.

[IVAIN comes in, beseeching and full of anguish.]

IVAIN.

Well? I was waiting for you to come up again, Helissant. I was in torture. What does Aude say?

HELISSANT.

Look at her.

IVAIN.

Ah, nothing good. Little sister, fierce little sister, why do you frown? How can you be so harsh, you

who are so gentle when you like? I beg of you, I beg of you.

AUDE.

All has been said.

IVAIN.

Do you wish me to kneel to you?

[HELISSANT sits down, bending forward, her chin resting on the back of her hand, her elbow on her knee, and she stays there, her eyes staring, her brain active beneath her impenetrable brow.

AUDE.

No, Ivain, do not speak to me as though I were a capricious child. And speak like a man yourself. For a moment throw aside your coaxing manner. This is no occasion to try to make me smile; evasion is only puerile contrivance. You brought our mother here without warning any one.

IVAIN.

I did not think the surprise would so displease you.

AUDE.

Do not use mundane phrases. They are out of

place. It is not a question here of either decorum or custom. Truth does not change—at least, mine does not.

IVAIN.

But this is not a question of a stranger. It is the question of my mother, who is also yours.

AUDE.

And of her husband, I believe.

IVAIN.

But . . .

AUDE.

Answer me frankly. You have brought him too?

IVAIN.

Not yet into our house.

AUDE.

Where then? Why do you hesitate? Perhaps you are waiting for night, to usher him stealthily into the house that he knows so well. Is there still too much light? And which room is allotted to him? The one at the end of the glass-panelled gallery? It

seemed to me I heard the door creak by itself on its hinges, the windows burst open of themselves, some one turn the mattresses and shake the counterpanes.

IVAIN.

Aude! Aude!

AUDE.

It is not true? Tell me it is not true! And yet the whole night long I heard rappings, as in church during the gloomy offices of Holy Week. Did not *you*?

IVAIN.

Ah, you are mad!

AUDE.

You would have been terrified.

IVAIN.

What do you wish, then? Tell us, what must we do to pacify you?

AUDE.

Do not despair like this. I have nothing to wish, nothing to impose. Helissent is the only one to do that. I am nothing. Are you not all of the same

mind? I wish to humble myself. I crave your pardon for having such a troublesome memory. Am I threatening to lay myself across the threshold, to bar the entrance, or to force any one to pass over my body? I have already told you I am going away. I am ridding you of my presence. The twilight is beautiful, and out there are some lanes I have not yet revisited. . . .

IVAIN.

What madness is in you? You refuse to see your mother, her at least, her alone! Do you think you have not made her cry enough already?

AUDE.

It is true. I am the wicked daughter. You are the good son.

[Her deep anguish weakens her voice, even in its irony.]

IVAIN.

Memory for memory, *mine* goes further back. Love does not judge. I, who am the son of her flesh, would not dare judge her, or pronounce a doubting word against any one of her actions. If I look at her, my heart melts.

AUDE.

Mine is oppressed.

IVAIN.

In short, you wish to prevent her living?

AUDE.

I have lived and do live, in death. I did not know it to be so radiant.

IVAIN.

Child! You who strike and condemn, what do you know of life? It is less radiant, no doubt, but far more difficult.

AUDE.

No more so than a choral or a fugue for you. Now you have succeeded in making me smile, and have taken away all my desire to cry. Your old Bergamo organ contains but flute-like sounds even for "the grave, deep tones." Perhaps you will have to add another register. May God keep you, blind brother of mine, and may Helissent lead you by the hand through the bitter fragrance of these alleys. I will pray for you. I wish only to be alone, so as to find

pity for myself, and for you, and for that one whom I have disowned, and for the penitent pilgrim . . .

[At this moment LAURENCE DAGON appears on the threshold, absolutely ghastly. HELISSENT catches sight of her first ; she gets up and takes a few steps towards her, with a welcoming expression.]

HELISSENT.

Ah! . . .

[IVAIN turns round, distraught.]

IVAIN.

Oh, Mother!

[He goes towards her with the most tender solicitude.]
Come, come, dearest, dearest Mother. Do you feel a little better? Tell me!

[AUDE remains standing, unable to move. Her emotion is revealed by the manifest trembling of her whole body.]

HELISSENT.

You are not well. I beg of you, sit down.

LAURENCE.

Thank you. Please forgive me. This is to be only a brief visit.

HELISSANT.

That would grieve me.

[Her amiability is measured and circumspect ; but the three creatures of the same flesh and blood are carried away in a turmoil of anguish that their breathing itself seems to hasten. The first words that they exchange are devoid of all life, of all weight, and are uncertain ; but the mother's mouth seems all swollen like some great vein from the heart, which suddenly colours with suffering all the words she speaks to her motionless daughter.]

LAURENCE.

Aude, you do not kiss me?

AUDE.

Forgive me, Mother, if I cause you sorrow. I would do everything to avoid this moment.

[She is bloodless, staggering, and her poor chin trembles at each syllable. The mother gazes at her from head to foot with a look which sllaw from her eyes with the power of a

spring which, lost beneath the earth, is suddenly formed again and reopened.

LAURENCE.

You will not?

AUDE.

Perhaps you heard some of my words as you came in?

LAURENCE.

I heard nothing but the beatings of my heart, my poor child.

AUDE.

Mine is so heavy, I can bear it no longer.

LAURENCE.

But how you have grown! Let me look at you. It seems to me I did not make you thus.

[She comes nearer and watches her with an almost awe-struck attention.]

Aude! Is it you, Audain? You have so changed in these few years. But you are beautiful, you are perhaps more beautiful. Your eyes are larger, much larger. I do not know what used to shine round

their pupils, like iron dust round a magnet. They contain too much sorrow, far too much; and the determination not to weep, and the obstinacy of suffering. Do not turn them from me. Look at me. Your eyebrows are thicker. Your hair is darker, and you used not to wear it like that. Ah! I remember the way it separated there on your right temple. You hold yourself differently, you have a different way of standing. . . . There is in you a strength I did not give you. You are nineteen, and it seems as if all these years I had not known you. Oh! let me have you once more within me. Let me bear you again, Audain!

[Her arms are thrown out in an irresistible movement.]

AUDE.

Mother, it must not be!

LAURENCE.

Must not?

AUDE.

My thoughts are against you.

LAURENCE.

You disown me?

AUDE.

Oh, pity me, I do not know. I know nothing. I am suffering.

LAURENCE.

I will not let you suffer any more. I have only tenderness for you. I am here to win you back.

AUDE.

Everything about you breaks my heart.

LAURENCE.

My poor, poor little one. How can such words come from your human heart?

AUDE.

I must have found the courage to say it from the depth where one no longer even hears the beating of one's bleeding heart.

LAURENCE.

What a voice! It is not the voice I gave you. Where does it come from? Deeper than the heart, that I know. Beneath the great root of life, which

cannot be torn out without destroying everything. One feels more blood in it than tears. But it is our own blood which, the more it rankles against us, the more we are tormented.

AUDE.

I beg you, I beseech you, let me go away. I fear that suddenly the strength will fail me to stifle what is rising, what is clamouring within me.

LAURENCE.

Well, then, tear me to pieces. I bear you like a burning scar; but tear me, rend me once more, if you must be born of me a second time—born of my great suffering.

AUDE.

Of mine, of mine alone am I born again. And by what effort, and with what soul, you can never know.

LAURENCE.

That soul you have wrought is my terror.

AUDE.

If you knew . . .

LAURENCE.

Well, let me know. I am here to listen, to be questioned, to answer. I am here, that my errors may be disclosed to me, that I may be shown my shame, face to face. I have no more pride. You see, I do not hesitate before the humiliation of coming here like an intruder, an importunate visitor. . . .

IVAIN.

Mother !

LAURENCE.

It is so. My visit was not announced. I was expected and desired only by this poor child, who perhaps still remembers having slept on my knees.

IVAIN.

That and all other good things, and nothing else, now and always.

[He is standing rather in the background, leaning on a table, and pale with the continual waves of emotion that shake him.]

[Illumed for one instant by that act of faith, rapidly the mother puts her hand to her forehead, her

breast, her two sides, and finally to her lips; then she extends it to her son, and turns towards him as if she wished to unite the sign of the cross to a sign of love.

[The daughter-in-law has remained aloof under one of the arches of the vestibule. She is seated near a laurel bush trimmed into a round shape, and looks from time to time at the purple twilight ebbing on the squared garden, where the bronze of the yew trees and the hornbeam becomes darker and darker.]

LAURENCE.

Look, he pardons me, if I am to blame. He does not repulse me; he accepts me, absolves me. And his wife wishes to share his feeling and his thought, seems to consent with him. I am without pride. You see? Pride has no part in my life. I can no longer live in this grief which has an air of shame, in this sort of inexorable banishment which severs me from my own soul. Now it is you who banish me, only you. You alone I see raised against me, armed against me, determined to renounce me. . . .

AUDE.

Oh, do not say that.

LAURENCE.

I might say, "Let blood call to blood." But no, I do not speak as a mother. I speak as a woman. To be a mother, one needs a terrible power. I speak to you as a poor woman; to you, who have the features of a creature filled with passion and knowledge, to that face which, a while ago, was framed to the chin in smooth bands of hair like a little tender almond in its cleft shell, here between my two hands. . . .

AUDE.

I have worshipped each vein of your hands.

LAURENCE.

Are they now so contaminated that they are not worthy to touch you? And yet I would wish to hold you, as then, to take you and hold you in front of my sorrow, and say, "Here you are. At last I have you. I am looking at you. This evening I have drawn you from the shadow which has hidden you for so long. Speak to me without hesitation, without pity. I am ready to take the worst upon myself. Tell me the truth. And then, if it is necessary—good-bye!"

AUDE.

I am more afraid of looking at you than of dying. In keeping firm before you, in holding myself up and listening to you, I consume more strength than I have needed during these three years to uplift my despair. I cannot resist that which trembles round your lips. You trouble me. I cannot see you trembling without my strength failing.

LAURENCE.

Do you still love me, then ?

[Her cry is smothered, wrenched from her deepest self.]

AUDE.

It is the blood repulsing the blood, the flesh that fears the flesh. This is so, even if you will not acknowledge it, and it is a thing that is mortal. It is horrible to realise too acutely that our voices pass through our teeth. If I speak, I wound ; if I question, I torture. If you answer, you strike.

LAURENCE.

What matters, so long as something human is saved ?

Strength is not animosity ; strength is love. My will to love is everything. My errors are nothing.

AUDE.

May God hear you ! Then why do you require to be absolved ? All is obliterated, all is forgotten. No ashes are so heavy that they cannot be scattered to the four winds. You are saved, saved in yourself, saved in your kinsmen. Nothing is left but my suffering. I have only that. Why do you wish to take it from me ? You could not ; no one could. It is part of my bones and my veins, it is my marrow and my pulse ! When the first lamp was lit on the first evening we came, I put my hand against the flame to see it through my reddened palm. It was there, more mine than my own soul. You could have touched it.

LAURENCE.

Your suffering is inhuman. It bends you in two. You are so young.

AUDE.

Am I young ?

LAURENCE.

So alive, and you pant under a dismal burden,

AUDE.

And who would bear it if not I? Let me go away, and you will see no longer either the bearer or the burden. But if you force me to stay, I do not know what I shall do. I know that I should only do something wrong. I have suffered enough to dare anything.

LAURENCE.

Ah! truly, my poor brain is going. It is a law of death, then, you wish to impose on one who is only guilty of continuing to live? You reproach me with the shame of not having sacrificed myself on the stake?

AUDE.

Neither death nor shame nor even all these words. One does not dare say the only thing that matters; and conscience is a wound which never heals and yet does not kill. I have begged to be allowed to keep silence and go. I ask but that. I know my way. Imagine that I have already stepped into the realm of night. Suppose that I am going to my nuptials. We are in April and the sky will be filled with stars. But do not ask me what you would not have the strength to listen to, and do not assume that I shall

throw my heart under the heel of the loathsome guest who is on the point of coming back.

LAURENCE.

Ah! this is your hatred! It chokes you.

AUDE.

No. I thrive on it.

LAURENCE.

What has he done to you? You cannot forgive his having stretched out his hand to me when every misfortune hemmed me in, and I was left to fight alone, and when you, in your desperation, had already unjustly and secretly risen against me.

AUDE.

Desperation? Yes, you are right. What had I become? You took no notice of me, and yet my eyes were already large and watchful with that iron dust round the pupils. How many things have slipped from your memory!

LAURENCE.

And from yours?

AUDE.

None, none. I remember everything. And I am not alone. Another remembers within me, and with what clearness!

LAURENCE.

You do not remember, then, that you worshipped him?

AUDE.

Whom?

LAURENCE.

The one you hate.

AUDE.

Ah! How can you say that?

LAURENCE.

When he spoke, you hung on his words. When he was expected, you could not curb your impatience. You watched for his coming from the top of the terraces. You ran down the steps to meet him.

AUDE.

It is not true.

[She is there, close to the worn torso, shaking with anger, fierce and dangerous.]

LAURENCE.

You knew that March violets pleased him, and you spent hours picking them for him under the cypresses. You used to put some between the pages of books, some on the window-sills, some under his napkin and even in his gloves.

AUDE.

It is not true, it is not true.

LAURENCE.

What! Your brother is here and can vouch for it. Ivain remembers, no doubt, how amused he was with your constant theme, which ended or interrupted all conversation: "And now tell me a wonderful story."

[She tries to soften her expression sufficiently to feign a smile, even to imitate her own of long ago, hoping to disarm AUDE. But the sombre flame which had suddenly suffused the adversary's face gives place to a deathly pallor.]

AUDE.

It is not true. What childishness!

[*She is bent rather forward, quivering, an evil light in her eye, with that fierce look that belongs to all wounded energy on the point of leaping forth.*

[*HELISSANT has risen and come closer. Attentive and alone, she follows the painful struggle. Something keen and daring seems to sharpen her features, as if she scented in the atmosphere some unknown risk.*

[*Night is falling on the silent garden, in which the box borders are already as black as inlaid ebony. On the rigid wall of hornbeam a long and narrow ray of sulphurous light still lingers. A large bluish cloud hangs in the sky, heavy with rain. Dusk slowly invades the room, occupying the two apses and filling the niches. Only on the marble statue of "Abundance" a veil of light lingers before breaking away to return to the West.*

Be careful, Mother. Do not go beyond the limits. You can lay such a useless trap in the hope of catching me. How that poor smile must have hurt you!

LAURENCE.

Nothing disarms you, not even the last drop of tenderness wrung from such torture.

AUDE.

Ah! The tenderness! You fill my hands with those violets so that I should hold them out and offer them again, and cover the threshold with them? May God heal my hands! I did not wish this evening to pronounce a single word that might tempt the shadow, but you do not fear to tempt it. But if, instead of the guest who is expected, that other ghost should suddenly appear from below the earth . . .

LAURENCE.

Aude, Aude, you frighten me!

AUDE.

Beware! It is not enough to leave him unnamed. It is not enough to pass him in silence, for him not to exist, for him not to be present. He still lives here; he lives here always, and if you come, it can only be to visit him, for his soul fills the whole void.

LAURENCE.

Oh, God !

AUDE.

It is a soul that still retains a face. Look ! He has again taken his face of flesh, his kindly mouth, his dreamy eyes, his thoughtful brow. He is there, behind you. He is at your side. He is here.

[She rushes towards her trembling brother, whose head she takes between her hands.]

LAURENCE.

Ah ! do not frighten me, Aude. Have pity ! I am becoming mad.

[She starts back, shivering, and turns round, white with anguish.]

AUDE.

He is here. Look at him. *[The brother staggers, his knees give way.]* Have you forgotten him ? Recognize him. Is he not alive ?

[The unfortunate woman, before falling to the ground, lifts her two arms towards her son, as if beating the air.]

Destiny itself might be mistaken.

[*The mother bursts into tears, and falls distractedly by her kneeling son, whilst AUDE turns round, covering her face with her hands, but without shedding a tear.*

[*With an effort, IVAIN rises to support the sorrowing mother. Filled with tenderness, his arm around her, he rests his cheek against hers and slowly takes her away.*

[*HELISSANT comes nearer to her sister-in-law, touches her shoulder, then seizes her wrists to uncover her face.*

HELISSANT.

You are crying?

[*In the dimness, she feels AUDE's cheek to know whether her tears are falling.*

AUDE.

No, I am not crying. I must keep my face for the coming smile. Forgive us, Helissant, for all these painful and odious scenes. You shall have no more trouble. It is I who oppress and separate you all. There is no room for me here. The night is falling.

E

Do you hear? Another shower, but not so heavy. Listen. It is raining on the box and the hornbeams. This is truly the hour when one becomes intoxicated with bitter fragrance. The spring is melting and the world is effaced. How happy the Swallow would be if she saw me arrive suddenly at Sormarin more drenched than she was! What are you thinking of, Nocturne?

HELISSENT.

I am thinking of your simile and that mirror in which you imagined two hands.

AUDE.

When I have gone, unhook it from the wall, take it and carry it into your room.

HELISSENT.

Anything may become an instrument of magic.

AUDE.

Magic and madness have a great resemblance.

HELISSENT.

Perhaps that is true.

AUDE.

Both the one and the other draws the soul out of itself.

HELISSANT.

Love, too, and martyrdom.

AUDE.

And one must not weep. One tear withheld may become a magic thought to lighten us on the dark road.

HELISSANT.

That must be true. When I used to cry, I always bent my head forward so that the tears should fall on my dress, without hollowing my cheeks. Now I am willing to restrain them, the new ones, if they come.

AUDE.

Thus I go without fear towards the unknown.

HELISSANT.

You would do better to wait for it, little sister.

[A pause. The whole house is silent as though breathless. One hears nothing but the even rustling of the spring rain on the black garden.]

AUDE.

Listen. I ask you most sincerely to be a real elder sister to me in this hour, Helissent.

[She seems again to yield to her emotion.]

HELISSANT.

Dear little sister, I love your face, your breath, your passion, and your ecstasy. I love, too, your destiny, unless you smother it. Do not be suspicious. Tell me, I am listening.

[Suddenly the young girl starts.]

AUDE.

Helissant ! Who is there ?

[She seizes HELISSANT by the arm, stepping back.]

HELISSANT.

Where ? What is it ? What do you see ?

AUDE.

I saw something like the shadow of a man, there, behind the disused fountain,

HELISSANT.

Do not frighten me. Your mind is wandering.

AUDE.

No, no! Some one is there.

[They press one against the other, communicating their mutual fear.]

HELISSANT.

Who is there?

[PIERRE DAGON mounts the flight of steps and enters the hall.]

AUDE.

It is a man, a living man.

[She recognizes him and can hardly stifle a scream, whilst releasing herself from her sister-in-law and retreating still farther.]

He! It is he!

[The guest takes off his hat and crosses the hall. He has complete control of himself, in his simple and perfect courtesy; but from time to time one can feel in his voice a suppressed agitation.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Pray forgive me for intruding in this fashion. I

am Pierre Dagon. I was wandering in the park, waiting to be fetched. It is getting late and pouring with rain. I came in the hope of finding a servant. Forgive this involuntary intrusion. May I ask if Madame Dagon is still here?

[He catches sight of the young girl, who, standing near the statue in the shade, has her eyes fixed on him.]

Ah! it is you, Aude! Your mother . . .

[Hearing that voice pronounce her name, she loses all control of herself. She interrupts him with sudden violence. Anger strangles her words. She stands near the torso, erect, her head thrown back, her fists clenched, fierce and ardent.]

AUDE.

No, no, I will not have it. I will not have you pronounce *my* name or that other before me. I will not have you use that hypocritical voice, dare to address me, or attempt to influence me. Once more you will deceive them all, but not me. I hate you! I hate you! Now, with all my strength, I can throw in your face, before I leave, my hatred and contempt for you. You waited until night before coming in,

as if you were going to plunder the house a second time.

HELISSENT.

Aude!

AUDE.

Is it not true? Look at him. Look at his hands. How long had you been there prowling and spying? Did not the stones cry out? But they will cry out. When I caught sight of your shadow you seemed to be carrying a corpse. . . . It is a load that each day becomes heavier, until it crushes you under it.

HELISSENT.

Aude, I beg of you, I beg of you, calm yourself!

AUDE.

You got in here by a stratagem. You will stay—I know it. I know that skill. You will not be turned out, but honoured. The dead will be buried a second time, and the table will be laid each evening for the merciless guest.

HELISSENT.

I beg of you, Aude! It is not right . . .

AUDE.

Ah ! it is not right ! And you beg of me . . .

[She stops for a moment and changes suddenly. Her hostile fury forsakes her. Her voice loses its rasping tone, her whole personality seems to shrink. And yet, something more sinister still glitters beneath her eyelashes.]

My brother implores me, my mother entreats me. Now I feel grace descending on me. I want to be docile, better than a holy image. A "real little angel," as they say.

[She recoils slowly towards the door, which is behind her. Sarcasm contracts her mouth. A curiously childish expression is in contrast with her convulsed features.]

Father of my soul, you will find this evening, under your napkin, a bunch of violets, and perhaps another under your pillow. Will this please you ? Will this satisfy you ? And then you will tell me another wonderful story.

[AUDE has reached the threshold and fades into the night like a ghost.]

HELISSANT.

One would really think her mad. She frightens me. Had she not, a moment ago, the expression of a maniac, and the gestures, voice and look of one who is demented?

PIERRE DAGON.

She is a strange creature, not without power and beauty. It would be a great pity if she were to be lost. But she lives only by the fictions that are born in her heart, and each one, in her, seems to have a semblance of necessity. From the day when I ceased to tell her some "wonderful story," she must have told herself one, filled with gloom, and then she must have set herself to live it desperately.

[He speaks with a sort of calm and lucid melancholy, with a quiet assurance, like some one resolved to seize the substance of life and treat it as a master, attentively and soberly.]

HELISSANT.

Is that the cause of her suffering?

PIERRE DAGON.

For some time I watched this mysterious child with

the closest attention. Her soul is filled with confused images that crave interpretation. She had within her, then, so ardent a desire to be understood, and to understand, that her fervour resembled at times those birds which dash themselves against the lenses of a lighthouse, and break their wings without shutting their eyes.

[He is still standing. The young woman is leaning on the back of a chair, in her usual position, her chin resting on the back of her hand, and she seems to scrutinize him with her long eyes behind the mask of white satin. Like a one-edged weapon, her voice has a thin thread of raillery.]

HELISSENT.

Then you are one of those who can read in a virgin's soul? How wonderful! When I think of my soul as it was then, on the threshold of life, I compare it to a butterfly which rests, its wings raised so as to be joined at the sides which bear the colours and the signs, like the twin pages of two sections of a book, laid together face to face.

PIERRE DAGON.

And after?

HELISSENT.

After, I became a moth. By the way, they have not yet brought in the lamps! The only thing Aude needs, really, is a little happiness.

PIERRE DAGON.

As it so happens, the line of happiness is not found in her hand.

HELISSENT.

Are you also a palmist?

PIERRE DAGON.

She knew it. One day, however, she asked me with great seriousness: "Do you really believe one can die?"

HELISSENT.

And do *you* really believe it?

PIERRE DAGON.

Certain beings occasionally seem so far removed, they might be immortals. There were mornings when the air held her as though she were something

that must be kept for ever, like one of those bees enclosed in translucent amber where they have acquired a sort of eternity without honey. Then she would come towards me, with her dreams and her thoughts no less entangled than her hair filled with leaves, straws and thorns, after her wanderings in the deserted park. And she would remain silent, seeming to wait for me to unravel them.

HELISSANT.

Her tresses ?

PIERRE DAGON.

Her thoughts.

HELISSANT.

Are your hands skilful ?

PIERRE DAGON.

They are not without timidity.

HELISSANT.

That is perhaps why you hurt her.

PIERRE DAGON.

“What good this pain does me !” was one of her

precocious, mystical sayings. One day I heard her say to a little friend called Clariel, as a great secret, whilst their two hearts beat on the same level: "Teach me Venetian point, and I will teach you to shed the kind of tears that are unknown to you."

HELISSANT.

That is charming. A little while ago she was teaching me not to shed them.

PIERRE DAGON.

Something far more difficult, but perhaps more intoxicating. It is the teaching of a martyr.

HELISSANT.

Or of a magician.

PIERRE DAGON.

Is not one included in the other, by a common desire to overcome nature and the spirit? I believe that martyrdom is the true vocation of that child. See how she invents her torment, since she cannot be pierced with arrows nor torn on the spikes of the wheel!

HELISSANT.

She said just now : " I must keep my face for the coming smile."

PIERRE DAGON.

Another mystical saying. Ah ! who will save her ?

HELISSANT.

Love, perhaps.

PIERRE DAGON.

A poor deliverer.

[HELISSANT *changes her attitude and pronounces the following word with a sort of sudden and hidden perfidy.*

HELISSANT.

Vengeance !

PIERRE DAGON.

It does not satisfy. It is almost always in vain.

[HELISSANT *moves aimlessly about the room, disturbed, possessed by her demon ; the tone of her voice dulled by the dream, but always with a keen edge of irony.*

HELISSANT.

Time, solitude, madness, sanctity, death . . .

PIERRE DAGON.

What vast things !

HELISSANT.

A victory on bended knees.

PIERRE DAGON.

What vast things you dare to name at the approach of night !

[The rain ceases. It seems as if, on its thousand broken silvery threads, the silence is stretched so as to be reflected in the ebbing twilight that turns to green the great blind walls. But the atmosphere of the room is as if it were stirred by the torment of the spirit.]
HELISSANT stops.

HELISSANT.

Well, what are we waiting for ?

PIERRE DAGON.

Good-bye! Please forgive me and believe in the sincerity of my regret. Chance so decreed that my hesitations and my fears were severed at one blow. I regarded myself, at the moment of entering, a stranger, almost a beggar. On leaving, I know that I am regarded here as an enemy, almost a plunderer. However, I do not nurse the slightest resentment, and my trouble is bearable when compared to another, far heavier. I will wait for my wife at the gate. The rain has almost ceased. I should be infinitely obliged if you would have her informed of this. At all events, I shall not forget the end of this day.

[He bows low and goes towards the hall.]

HELISSANT acknowledges his bow silently, her hands clasped behind her back. Then she continues to wander in the shadow of the room, agitated by anxious doubts. Whilst the visitor descends the flight of steps, she stops to watch him. She takes a few uncertain steps towards the portico. Suddenly she recalls him.

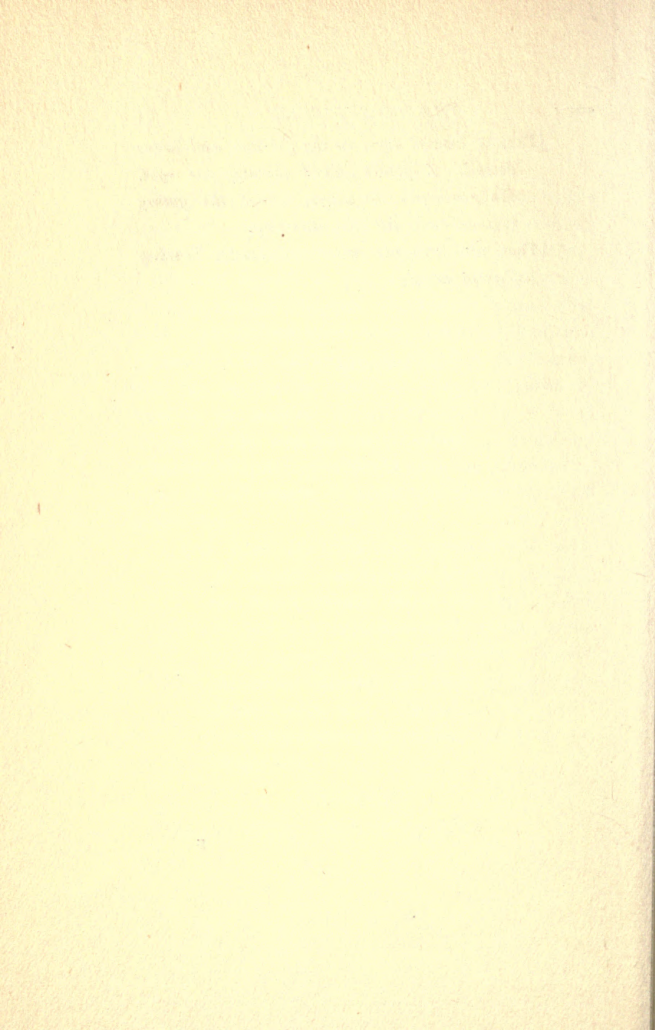
HELISSANT.

I beg you to stay. You are my guest.

[PIERRE DAGON *stops in the shadow, and turns round. A gleam passes through his eyes. He remounts the steps, whilst the young woman waits for him, standing.*

[*Two old servants enter noiselessly, bearing lighted lamps.*

CURTAIN.



THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: AUDE'S room, the one she used as a young girl, simple and pure, hung with brocade of green and white (a budding green, the white of mother-of-pearl) under a ceiling of rafters and beams, with painted arrises bearing the device of the "Hazel and Honeysuckle," just as the noble Hardré adorned it.

The small virginal bed occupies a corner contrived in the left wall, and screened by curtains. A large latticed window, in a deep recess of the wall opposite, lets in the daylight, to which the swaying foliage of the green oaks gives the effect of a transparent sea. In the thickness of the other wall, forming the outer angle, giving on to the park, a few steps lead up through a large glass door to a stone terrace, encircled by a balustrade and covered with a bower of wistaria, upheld by a wooden trellis, equal in elegance to the "loggetta" of Paul V. in the Roman Villa of Mondragora. From there a few steps lead down into one of the hanging gardens. On

low bookshelves, filled with books, are potteries, caskets, framed prints, a few Burgundian statuettes of mourners, an inlaid Kiss of Peace, a Limoges triptych by the first Jean Pénicaud, one of those enamels that look as if many glazed black eyes were gleaming fiercely out of their dazzling white sockets.

A graceful harpsichord with two keyboards the colour of ivory, polished like the keys and decorated with little garlands of myrtle tied with pink ribands, slumbers away in a corner, under books of music bound in parchment.

Faded green and white brocade covers also the chairs, the sofas and the tables. A green tapestry hides the door on the left, leading into the next room.

It is an afternoon at the beginning of June. The sun, through the thick clusters of the wistaria, shines with a transparency of amethysts, as if it were dyed in the purple tunic of a Saint on the stained-glass window of a chapel. Under these mauve reflections that mottle the daylight, made green by the foliage of the great oaks, the whole room is filled with a strange light, almost livid in the shadowy corners.

By the terrace with the shining wistarias THE SWALLOW *has just entered, clad as usual in white and blue-black, but in a new style. Still holding back with*

one hand the open casement, she bears in the other arm a mass of fresh tangled honeysuckle, which buries her bosom in fragrance up to the chin. She leans from the top of the steps towards THE MAID, who approaches softly.

THE SWALLOW.

Is she not there?

THE MAID.

She is resting.

THE SWALLOW.

Where?

THE MAID.

There—on her little bed.

THE SWALLOW.

How long has she been there?

THE MAID.

About an hour.

THE SWALLOW.

She was not feeling well?

THE MAID.

She never feels well. Again last night she never

closed her eyes. Oh, dear! I heard her moving until dawn.

THE SWALLOW.

Has the doctor been?

THE MAID.

Yes, Miss. He said she had a little fever, this morning.

THE SWALLOW.

Very little?

THE MAID.

Oh, it is certainly not that which makes her delirious.

THE SWALLOW.

What do you say, Aibeline? She has been delirious?

[She runs down the steps rapidly and comes nearer.]

THE MAID.

It is a fixed idea, Miss, and they call it delirium.

THE SWALLOW.

Always her father?

THE MAID.

Always. It is an idea that never leaves her. Even before coming back here, it never ceased to obsess her. I know it well. I do not forget the dark days we spent at the time of Madame Laurence's marriage to Monsieur Dagon.

THE SWALLOW.

As for me, Aibeline, I cannot understand. There must be something in it all.

THE MAID.

There certainly is something.

THE SWALLOW.

But what?

THE MAID.

How can I tell you, Miss?

THE SWALLOW.

This hatred for her father-in-law . . .

THE MAID.

It is a very bitter hatred,

THE SWALLOW.

But it used not to be so. What can he have done to her?

THE MAID.

How can I tell you?

THE SWALLOW.

Why? I thought you knew everything.

THE MAID.

I know nothing about anything.

THE SWALLOW.

What a pity!

THE MAID.

She confides in no one. And you know how obstinate she is. She keeps all her thoughts in her little stubborn head, and, as if they were not sufficiently guarded, she makes me surround them with her hair twisted in tight coils.

THE SWALLOW.

It suits her really very well.

THE MAID.

To be sure it does. But when I do her hair, morning and evening, she no longer talks. She used to sing softly in her hair, as in a cage of russet wicker. Now she is silent and only muses and meditates. Even when I think I must have hurt her, she does not move; and I confess I feel a sort of fear—a dread—that sometimes my hands are plunging into her living grief.

THE SWALLOW.

Ah, living! Surely they are living, those tresses of a young fury; they seem as though they remembered having once been serpents. . . .

THE MAID.

Serpents, Miss!

THE SWALLOW,

Little serpents without fangs, Aibeline; little adders of no importance, without head or tail, and incapable of harm. But is it not true that, when they are not tightly coiled in a plait, they seem to escape? I wish mine were like that, too, so that in the evening some one might charm them with a little flute.

THE MAID.

There you are; one wishes for one thing, and another wishes for another. You are lucky, though, Miss, to have found the charmer!

THE SWALLOW.

Am I blushing, Aibeline?

[With a graceful movement, she impulsively drops the bunch of honeysuckle, and, opening her enamel case, she looks at herself in the mirror hidden between the powder and the puff. At the same time she powders her nose.]

THE MAID.

One takes no notice of it, Miss. It is cherry-time.

THE SWALLOW.

Listen, Aibeline. Something must be done.

THE MAID.

Well?

THE SWALLOW.

Does it not seem to you that she is suffering, as if she were love-sick—without love?

THE MAID.

When one suffers, it is all the same.

THE SWALLOW.

Ah !

THE MAID.

And what would you suggest ?

THE SWALLOW.

What would I not do to cure my Audain ? I think I would even give her my happiness, if it were possible. But one cannot, because he is too big a boy. If I were really a swallow I would go away and fetch her that unknown him that one waits for always ; who, before he came to me, dwelt in the corner of the golden sky, whence come the swallows certain evenings, suddenly, whirring over us with so white a flash that one feels, " Ah ! this is he who has just added a wing to the birds."

THE MAID.

May your lovely dreams be in God's keeping ! But if he came, perhaps he would not be welcome,

THE SWALLOW.

He would not come if one were not waiting for him.

THE MAID.

But one does not know what one is waiting for.

THE SWALLOW.

One waits only for love. [*She starts, thinking she hears a sigh behind the curtain.*] Aibeline, did you not hear? She is waking.

[*THE MAID, holding her breath, goes on tiptoe to listen.*]

THE MAID.

She is asleep. Often she moans in her sleep; sometimes she speaks. She talks to herself, too, when she is awake, shut in her room, during the day. I hear her and I think there is some one with her. I go in and I find her alone, walking to and fro, with her head drooping. Last night she ate nothing and did not go to bed. I heard her stride up and down the room until very late. I do not know what was the matter with her. Never have I seen her look so gloomy. One would have said she had just laid a snare for some one. . . .

THE SWALLOW.

Where did she come from?

THE MAID.

From the park. I do not know what she is looking for. She seems for ever on the watch. Now she almost always wears those laced sandals that make no noise. She slips from terrace to terrace, glides along the walls, hides behind the hedges, pries into every corner, just as you used to do—both of you, when you hunted for hedgehogs. . . .

[CLARIEL *interrupts her with childish vivacity.*

THE SWALLOW.

Aibeline, do you know, that tortoise . . .

THE MAID.

Which tortoise?

THE SWALLOW.

I will tell you after. . . . Go on! Go on! But why does she do that? What do you think?

THE MAID.

I do not know. They have always considered her

as a simple child, using no discretion before her. That is the pity of it. Even Miss Turner, in her day, did not understand her at all. And I maintain there is not her like in the world for seeing everything, divining everything. She pierces the soul. She frightens me when she stares at me. My heart trembles.

THE SWALLOW.

And what about mine? I almost had to shield it sometimes with my hand, like a candle, so that she should not see it burning. I am almost ashamed of being happy. I would like always to have red eyes when I come, so as to say to her: "You know they have made me cry too."

THE MAID.

But she does not cry at all. If she only could! Oh, God! Oh, God, help us to get through these two days! Oh, they are long!

THE SWALLOW.

They have lengthened by six hours, Aibeline.

[She brightens with an involuntary smile

THE MAID.

To-day is the day before the vigil of Corpus Christi.

THE SWALLOW.

It is true.

THE MAID.

To-morrow a requiem mass is to be said in the chapel.

THE SWALLOW.

Yes. It is the anniversary.

THE MAID.

I hardly know what they will do.

THE SWALLOW.

Will all of them attend it?

THE MAID.

May the departed soul send us a blessing to-day
Do you know what they are going to attempt?

THE SWALLOW.

What?

THE MAID.

Monsieur Dagon is to come and speak to her and

try to persuade her to remove her fixed idea—to cure her of her mania—to calm her, in fact. They declare it is the only thing to do in this crisis. It seems Monsieur Dagon is prepared to do so this very day, before evening. There must be some way out of this hidden hell; but I am very nervous about it. The doctor seems too anxious. The day before yesterday Miss Aude kept him for over an hour, talking and talking. And when he left he had such a sorrowful expression.

THE SWALLOW.

Is it Dr. Maclaine—the one who attended her father?

THE MAID.

The same. Well, that is what they are going to attempt, with the help of God.

THE SWALLOW.

May God grant us that help! I really believe, Aibeline, that great good may come of it. I have just seen a good omen.

[She speaks in a mysterious tone, almost solemnly.]

THE MAID.

What was it?

THE SWALLOW.

That poor tortoise, you know, with the shell all jagged and split, that we used to call the Old Mandrague, so dear to Aude, who thought she was lost, because she had not shown herself lately. . . .

THE MAID.

Well?

THE SWALLOW.

She has reappeared. Whilst I was taking great pains to uproot this honeysuckle, near the clump of hazel trees, I felt the bottom of my dress gently—oh, so gently—tugged at, as if by a shy kitten. I turned round. It was she, at my feet; it was she, wagging her head and looking like a snake that has just shed its skin.

THE MAID.

She was really tugging at your skirt?

THE SWALLOW.

Just as I tell you. Perhaps she took me for a lettuce. I lifted her in my two hands; I laid her gently on a beautiful warm stone and said to her: "Stay there, Mandrague, without moving. I will

soon bring you the fairy Aude." I think she must have understood.

[She stops a moment and strains her ear towards the curtains, all quivering.]

Is she not waking up? She seems to be sighing.

THE MAID.

She seems to be sleeping heavily.

THE SWALLOW.

She must sleep her sleep out. She will wake up refreshed and ready to let herself be cured. What can one do, Aibeline? Oh! is there no magic potion?

THE MAID.

If there is one, and if a heart is needed to crush, here is mine.

[Her simple, grave voice is tremulous with unlimited devotion.]

THE SWALLOW.

You love her, I know. Ah, how good it is to hear love expressed thus! Take care of her always, gentle Aibeline. I leave the honeysuckle here for her.

[She strews the long tendrils on the carpet, in front of the curtains, as a sort of trap.]

Do not put them anywhere else, I beg of you. I wish that in coming out from behind the curtains she should step into them and stay there, entangled, and that she should say, laughing low: "It is Clariel."

[She imitates her friend, lifting a mischievous finger up to her pouting face. She is so loving and gentle that there are almost tears in her voice.]

I am going, but I will come back. I will come towards evening. Ah! but I should like to see her one instant, one instant! Just time to put my face between the curtains, Aibeline, and look at her. Quite softly, quite softly! I am holding my breath.

[THE MAID makes a gesture of compassionate consent. With infinite precaution, CLARIEL draws the curtain slightly apart with her fingers and looks in. There is a great silence, as when human anguish rises little by little up to the brink of the eyelashes and overflows. She turns round suddenly, her hands clutching at her throat as if to arrest the sob that almost strangles her. She fails; the tears

burst forth. As she withdraws, running, she steps into the flowery trap, which she scatters and drags after her. She reascends the steps of the terrace, disappears in the transparency of the wistarias, and so "Black and White" goes back crying, to her happiness.

THE VOICE OF AUDE.

Aibeline! Aibeline!

THE MAID.

Here I am. I am here, Miss.

THE VOICE OF AUDE.

Ah! Who has tied me down?

[It is a deep wail, a voice of anguish still wrapped in the obscurity of sleep.]

THE MAID.

I have not moved—I have not moved!

THE VOICE OF AUDE.

Ah! Who was sobbing over me?

[She has a sort of breathlessness, as if, in order

to rise, she had to make an effort to break a cord that bound her. She appears between the two curtains, haggard, her forehead damp with sweat.

Who was sobbing? Myself? Tell me.

THE MAID.

No, Miss. You have been dreaming.

AUDE.

And these flowers? Tell me, Clariel has been here? Did she come, the Swallow?

THE MAID.

A moment ago.

AUDE.

She is gone? Oh, call her back—call her back! [*She walks on the fragrant tracks.*] She has passed up here? It is she who left behind her this trail? Call her back! Oh, sweet, sweet Swallow!

[THE MAID goes up to the balustrade.

THE MAID.

She said she would come again towards evening. Do not fret.

[She disappears by the steps leading below to the hanging garden.]

AUDE.

Will it not be too late towards evening? It is the vigil. It is my vigil! I wished to say good-bye to her, to see myself again in her, as I used to be—to say good-bye to myself, to her poor Audain.

[She is still somewhat breathless, her face veiled in a dream. She leans down to disengage one of her ankles entwined in the creeper.]

It was you who tied me up, Clariel!

[Between her stooping face and her body bent forwards, her voice has a peculiar intonation, almost silvery—that of a child. Then again she becomes gloomy.]

I could not move when I woke up. I was all tied up. Why? And who was sobbing?

[She staggers and touches her moist forehead with her fingers.]

But if it was only fever? No, I have no more fever:

I must not have any. I must have nothing but courage, courage, courage.

[She shakes herself and straightens her figure.]

[THE MAID comes back, passes under the bower of wistaria, and steps down into the room.]

THE MAID.

I could not overtake her nor call her back. She had already disappeared.

AUDE.

She flies, I know.

[The words are illumined once more by a tender smile.]

THE MAID.

But she is coming back—she is coming back.

AUDE.

Tell me, Aibeline, it was she who was crying?

THE MAID.

No, Miss.

AUDE.

Well then, who was it?

THE MAID.

I assure you, on the contrary, she was very gay.
She brought you great news.

AUDE.

Great news?

THE MAID.

Yes; that tortoise you used to call the Old Mandrague has appeared once more. She found it just now, by the clump of hazel trees.

AUDE.

It is true?

[Once again, in a spontaneous outburst of youth, she shows herself to be CLARIEL'S companion, the untamed friend of the swallow.]

THE MAID.

Yes, quite true. You shall hear the whole story.

AUDE.

But who was crying? It seemed to me I was awakened by a great sob.

THE MAID.

Believe me, it was a dream.

AUDE.

No one else came? My mother?

THE MAID.

Not yet, Miss. How do you feel?

AUDE.

Well.

THE MAID.

Has the fever abated, do you think?

AUDE.

Yes.

THE MAID.

You do not shiver?

AUDE.

No.

THE MAID.

Your forehead is rather moist. Would you like anything?

[AUDE takes a bottle of perfume, pours some on a handkerchief, inhales it and presses it gently to her forehead, her neck, behind her ear.

THE MAID.

I heard some one knock at the door.

THE VOICE OF HELISSENT.

Aude, are you there? May I come in?

THE MAID.

Do you feel ill? How pale you have become!

AUDE.

Be quiet! Go! don't come, unless I call you.

[She takes a step towards the door, bracing herself up.

Come in—come in, Helissent!

[THE MAID lifts up the tapestry, and, as HELISSENT walks in, she slips out behind her. The two sisters-in-law look at each other, forcing a smile of greeting and welcome, like something attached to their faces and capable of staying there always if one forgot to unfasten

it. Between them seems to float a vague enmity.

HELISSANT.

How do you feel?

AUDE.

Well, thank you. I slept for an hour. Sleep brings patience.

HELISSANT.

Are you more peaceful?

AUDE.

I am peaceful—you see I am. Clariel has strewn my room with flowers before the time. You can come nearer; you can sit down. I am not in a wild mood; I am not at all dangerous. You must forgive me. Last night there was thunder in the air. I do not know what possessed me. "You worry every one with your shuddering." It was not you who said that to me—no, I do not remember. But I must: I must cure myself, this very day, of that strange infirmity. It is nothing, "only it mars all pleasure." I am going to be cured of all ills. It is sufficient to tell me; it is sufficient for me to will it. We have been promised that peace will be restored everywhere.

The day after to-morrow is Corpus Christi. I would like to give bread to some poor soul,

HELISSANT.

Then, all is well. What a strange light you have here!

AUDE.

The light in a ship that has foundered. You do not like it? And yet it seems made for you, who are so lithe.

HELISSANT.

Irony?

AUDE.

Oh, no, I admire you. And you know it. Each of your movements charms me. Just now, your suppleness seemed to enter into a whirlpool.

HELISSANT.

My dear, would you like us to talk a little seriously?

AUDE.

Let us talk.

HELISSANT.

Seriously and openly, as two loyal sisters?

AUDE.

"More worthy is foolish loyalty than clever treason" is one of our oldest sayings.

HELISSANT.

Well, listen, Aude. Let me broach the subject with frankness. It is my duty henceforth. It is I who welcomed here your mother and your stepfather. It is I who detained you here, who hindered your escaping and committing a useless folly ; it is I who, during these weeks, have watched without ceasing, so as to avoid all painful encounters, all odious scenes. I did not hesitate then to assume this charge, in view of what is happening and of what may happen ; and I will not withdraw from it.

AUDE.

That is right.

HELISSANT.

I understand and respect your sacred feeling
There is always surrounding you, manifest or concealed, a sort of compassion.

AUDE.

You think so ?

HELISSENT.

I do not wish to offend you : I mean to say that your grief, and the actions of your grief, have now and then something of mania, of delirium. I myself have sometimes treated you as a little invalid. No one has ever tried to get to the very root of your trouble. Besides, you retired into yourself : you kept aloof, to brood over your wrongs. There is in your nature an arrogance and scorn that repel confidence. Have you not even estranged your brother ?

AUDE.

Poor Ivain !

HELISSENT.

But, personally, I do not regard the anguish that oppresses you as an illness, as an incurable mania. And I speak to your reason—I appeal to your reason.

AUDE.

Poor reason !

HELISSENT.

You have so racked your brain that your reason has sunk to the bottom.

AUDE.

That is its place.

HELISSANT.

Very well. It is its place and the place of the motive—for there must be a motive.

AUDE.

The motive is pending.

HELISSANT.

Enigmas again! From everything about you rises an accusation—bursts forth the form of an accusation.

AUDE.

More than one, perhaps.

HELISSANT.

There is a proof, then?

AUDE.

There is a world in which proof has neither meaning nor existence.

HELISSENT.

Not in ours.

AUDE.

Not in yours.

HELISSENT.

You will have to emerge from this obscurity. You cannot continue this reserve. You have no longer the right to be silent, to try to escape. . . .

AUDE.

I do not try to escape.

HELISSENT.

Very well, then. It is necessary we should come to some understanding, in all good faith. It is no longer possible either for you or for your mother, or for the accused, or for myself who harbour you (and this I say to you without emphasizing the word, but simply because I bear Ivain's name, because I am called Helissent de la Coldre, because I direct the household and am several years older than you), it is no longer possible to let this misery drag on without end.

AUDE.

You are right. To-day is the vigil.

HELISSANT.

Your stepfather, in so difficult a situation, could not act with more tact, more delicacy, more patience. You must admit this.

AUDE.

He, too, is very supple.

HELISSANT.

To all your want of consideration he has always replied with the most indulgent kindness. He has never shown a trace of bitterness either in a word or a smile. Really, I have admired him. And often I have felt ill at ease—almost wanting in hospitality. Now I confess this restraint has become intolerable to me. Your mother's distress terrifies me.

AUDE.

Poor mother!

[She is sunk in an arm-chair, leaning back, all huddled up, shivering as though the fever

were returning, with one arm under her cheek, looking through her eyelashes, that quiver as if the pupils were being constantly wounded. The brief words have an indefinable inflection which is neither irony nor pity. They seem to come from that profound depth "where one hears not even the beating of the heart." The adversary, anxious to get to the end of the discussion, does not stop for them and does not interpret them. She goes on speaking in a sort of cold stupor, and her voice becomes insincere. She herself realizes its insincerity, but cannot help it. She continues—resolute.

HELISSANT.

I understand and I respect your feeling, I repeat it, where it is most faithful, and even inaccessible. I understand that the return to the home of your memories should have exalted them, and that, at the approach of the sad anniversary, your heart should bleed. But I have conquered my scruples, because it seems to me that in the name of these memories, for the repose of that soul, this suffering should be overcome.

AUDE.

Yes, yes.

[Her voice now is almost inaudible—the voice of a little crushed creature that no longer knows how to breathe—something like that gasp of helpless assent that the despairing seem to oppose to vain consolation, to misunderstood advice, to reproaches that are not listened to. She is there in the arm-chair, all huddled up, almost non-existent, like some poor blighted being.]

HELISSANT.

I beg you, therefore, to give your consent to this explanation, which is necessary to dispel all these misunderstandings. One cannot imprison life in a network of enigma, or confine it in the frame of an old mirror. Is it not true? You agree?

AUDE.

Yes, yes.

HELISSANT.

There is to-day, it seems to me, a presence that

does not oppress us, as you maintain; but, on the contrary, comes to our rescue, encourages, helps us. If his spirit still haunts this house, as you think, he must suffer from this disquietude, this enmity, this perpetual anguish. I have heard his infinite kindness spoken of by the very person whom you suspect of a guilty heart. . . .

AUDE.

Oh, God!

[It is like the wail of one who is about to sink, forsaken by his own strength and all human help.]

HELISSANT.

If to resign yourself at last to the exigencies of life, to the decorum of life, is for your heart a sacrifice, make the sacrifice in memory of that kindness. Just think. To-morrow is the third anniversary. We shall all be there reunited in prayer. And then there will be peace, harmony in the restored home, a new life will dawn for you, who are wasting away, for your brother who is eating his heart out. . . .

AUDE.

Oh, God! Oh, God!

[She rises slowly, her face distraught, her eyes wild, pressing her temples with both hands, held by a horror which seems to have taken the place of her strength.]

What have I done? What have I become? Why must this also be inflicted upon me?

HELISSANT.

Aude!

AUDE.

Am I not yet sufficiently broken? It is not enough? No truce, no help, no refuge—nothing. And this atrocity is life—life that seemed so fresh in me; life I mourned, for the one who lost it—from whom it has gone for ever.

HELISSANT.

Aude!

AUDE.

Ah, I am cold! Do not be afraid if my teeth begin to chatter. What can I do? Do not be afraid if I look at you with these eyes. I have forgotten how to close them. Some one must seal them for me.

HELISSANT.

What is it? What is the matter with you now?

AUDE.

I live—that is what is the matter with me. I am alive; and if any one else ever came to know anything resembling what I have known, she would die, she would give up her soul without a struggle, without a moan. But I live, and I have no longer any incentive to live. I have no longer anything to believe in—anything to hope for, anything to save. And even to convince myself that I am in the mud, I shall have to eat some of it—to fill my mouth with it. . . .

HELISSANT.

In the name of Heaven, what is the matter with you? Is it the fever that is making you wander again?

AUDE.

Ah, no! Do not touch me; but hide these flowers from me—hide these leaves. . . .

HELISSANT.

You are mad. I am really beginning to think that you *are* mad.

AUDE.

Well, I will tell you something incredible: I am not mad yet—look at me!

[She straightens herself up, mastering her agitation, as if urged by a wave of strength from afar. Her sister-in-law is already standing in front of her, an opponent without a mask.]

HELISSANT.

I am looking at you.

AUDE.

I am holding up my head—I must hold it up, so as not to collapse suddenly, like some little old woman, without age, without name. I know now that in the look of a human being one can live twenty years, fifty years, an eternity of shame.

HELISSANT.

But what do you mean? I am not as patient as

Pierre Dagon—remember that. I face little old women disguised as threatening sphinxes, and I tame them.

AUDE.

With what? With the double-faced lie that seems to be and is not?

HELISSANT.

I tame them, I tell you.

AUDE.

With what? With that too crafty hypocrisy, that blends its mixtures of good and evil, of falsity and truth, of poison and balm, to excite itself and dupe others?

HELISSANT.

And what are the others to me, and what do they matter to me? I forbid you . . .

AUDE.

What? To be surprised that the cause of my mother's husband should be pleaded to-day by her daughter-in-law with a sanctimonious eloquence savouring of the pulpit?

HELISSANT.

What insolence! How dare you speak of venom—you, who exude it every moment and against every one; you, who are always ready to bite the hand that fondles you!

AUDE.

Why do you fondle me? It is a question I have asked you more than once. And I have always let my arms hang down at my side. I have always been suspicious.

HELISSANT.

Do not boast of your ingratitude and your wickedness! I have stood all your caprices, all your whims, with a good grace that you do not deserve. I have let you exhaust my patience too often. I have had enough. It will be your fault if you compel me to remember that, after all, there is a mistress here.

AUDE.

Legally, yes. And it is a good thing for the servants. But you will not lead your penitent pilgrim to kneel on that stone, nor crawl over the dead on his knees like a devotee.

HELISSANT.

I beg of you, I beg of you, do not provoke me into saying and doing things we should both of us bitterly regret afterwards. You do not know me. Take care. When I make up my mind I am like those who slay, and only sheathe their sword after having struck the death-blow.

AUDE.

Sword for sword. I am ready to try my strength, ready for everything. Look at me. There is a Judge above before whom I am nothing; but I will never be a servant where you are mistress. There is a Judge more holy than I, and you have dared to invoke Him, to cover a thing that cannot be acknowledged.

HELISSANT.

You have the likeness of death on you. You will die of your venom.

AUDE.

Yes, I am all frozen; but I know one cannot die of horror, since I am still standing. You have dared to offer for the peace of that soul—what? the repeated offences of that merciless guest!

HELISSANT.

What more are you going to insinuate?

AUDE.

Peace, harmony; a new life to give warmth to shame.

HELISSANT.

Must I lay hands on you, then? Must I tear from your throat this fresh slander?

[Infuriated, she makes a gesture as though about to seize by her shoulders the girl, who recoils, looking more ghastly than a bloodless spectre.]

AUDE.

Do not touch me! Be careful! You are touching death.

HELISSANT.

Tell me everything, then. Speak—I insist.

AUDE.

I can control my speech, but not my heart. With the guest . . .

[Her voice breaks, as she clenches her teeth.]

HELISSANT.

Well?

AUDE.

With the guest has there not crept in a *lover*?

[She has spoken in low and hurried tones. The other does not seem less ghastly, but the whole foundation of her beauty hardens like the countenance of a tyrant who cannot strike, because he has at hand neither weapon nor executioner. They both of them gasp in the silence.]

HELISSANT.

Is that a treacherous question—a suspicion—a deliberate trap?

AUDE.

A certainty.

HELISSANT.

A certainty in this world where proof neither exists nor counts?

AUDE.

Let it be sufficient that I know, that I have heard, that I have seen.

HELISSANT.

Where? How?

[She leans towards the accuser, who, writhing at her own misery, ceases to look at her.]

AUDE.

Horrible! Life endured repeats itself—imitates its own terrors. Hideous destiny plays the same part twice, and all will be as before! But who can answer me one question before I die?

HELISSANT.¹

Answer me quickly—I insist. Where? How?

AUDE.

And one day it seemed to me I was getting quite near the secret of love.

HELISSANT.

Where? How?

AUDE.²

Not of yours! Not of yours!

HELISSANT.

Answer—I insist.

[Imperiously she comes towards her, and seizes her by the wrists.]

AUDE.

I have heard all—I have seen all.

HELISSANT.

What? Where? You do not know; you are wandering—always deluded, drunk with dreams of infamy.

AUDE.

Let me go. I have a loathing for you and myself. I have spied; I have followed; I have listened. I know all the hidden places. I know all the innermost recesses, all the shadows. Last night—ah, let go of me!

HELISSANT.

No—tell me! Have *some* shame!

AUDE.

Where were you last night with him? At the

bottom of the steps of the Dolphins, under the trellis of Gloriande. . . .

HELISSENT.

Are you not ashamed?

AUDE.

Yes, I am ashamed. This is what you have all made of me. The little blood that is left in me I carry with fear. One comes to that, one knows that, one grows like that, and one never ceases to die.

HELISSENT.

You have been dreaming—you have been dreaming. Do you hear?

AUDE.

Let go of me!

HELISSENT.

You have been dreaming—you are delirious, you wicked madwoman! And you shall swear to me . . .

AUDE.

Let go of me! let go of me! I tell you!

[They are face to face, breath to breath, as in a violent struggle. AUDE frees herself.]

[IVAIN comes in. HELISSENT steps aside and throws her head back, showing her white teeth in a little, insincere laugh.]

IVAIN.

What is it? What is the matter with you, Helissent? Aude! what is it?

AUDE.

Nothing, nothing, Ivain. Do not be frightened. Helissent wanted to take me with her, for me to meet Monsieur Dagon, and she was trying to drag me. I resisted. That is all.

IVAIN.

Had you not already consented?

AUDE.

Yes. But why should I go to meet him? I prefer to receive him here, as I said before to our mother, especially as I don't feel quite well yet, and it is better I should not tire myself.

IVAIN.

Certainly, little sister. You are right. Do you not think so, Helissent, my love?

HELISSANT.

Why, yes, yes! I do not insist! It was not serious—it was just for fun.

AUDE.

You know quite well, Ivain, how fond she is of playing and teasing. . . .

[The young man looks at his wife tenderly.]

IVAIN.

How strange you look in this light!

AUDE.

Does she not?

HELISSANT.

Strange? In what way?

IVAIN.

If Richard Wagner could see you, he would recog-

nize the living image of one of those Rhine Maidens that float through his music.

HELISSANT.

Woglinde? Flosshilde?

IVAIN.

All three.

AUDE.

And the Gold, too.

HELISSANT.

Good-bye, Aude, until later.

AUDE.

In a new life.

IVAIN.

You are going, Helissant? Stay a little longer. Do you not feel how harmonious this room is? It is so pleasing to me. One hardly knows whether it has walls or branches, curtains or leaves,

HELISSENT.

Child, child! this is not the time to linger. Life is rushing onwards.

IVAIN.

Come into the chapel, towards seven, Helissent. I will play the "vesperal" on the organ. But I should so much like to see you before then. Where are you going?

HELISSENT.

I do not know.

[His eyes follow her whilst she goes out with her swaying gait. His sister takes him by the hand.]

AUDE.

How you love her!

IVAIN.

Ah, I can hardly tell whether my love gives me joy or pain! Do you understand? Why should that swing of her body on her supple limbs be able to hurt me so sometimes? When I look at her I feel her beauty as a shadow over me; yet it is a shadow that gives me no repose. It works on me and stimulates

me until I feel, if I do not want to lose it, I must complete it, and I do not know how to do it.

AUDE.

You love her so much?

[She lets herself drop on the cushions, still holding the hand of her brother, who sits at her feet. She questions him with an ill-concealed anxiety.]

Tell me.

IVAIN.

I love her, little sister; but I love you, too, very much.

AUDE.

You could not live without her? Tell me.

IVAIN.

You are jealous.

AUDE.

You could not imagine your life changing, becoming single again, steeped in music and melancholy?

IVAIN.

But why?

AUDE.

Suppose she were to go away, to leave?

IVAIN.

For what reason? How could she?

AUDE.

She does not seem to you remote, distant?

IVAIN.

I fold her in my arms.

AUDE.

She is childless.

IVAIN.

But what are you saying, Aude? You are blushing at it yourself.

AUDE.

And suppose she were to die?

IVAIN.

Ah, no! I should disappear—I should wish to die, too.

AUDE.

You love her so much?

IVAIN.

Yes. Do not be jealous.

AUDE.

You are right. To wish to love means to prepare oneself for death. Such is my love. And I pity you. Ah! why has your hand not sufficient strength?

[Nervously she feels the palm of his hand and his fingers.]

IVAIN.

Do you not feel? It is of jointed iron, like a gauntlet.

AUDE.

For the organ.

IVAIN.

But what are you talking about?

[He is impatient and agitated, overcome by the indefinable phantoms she seems to create by breathing the fragments into his soul.]

AUDE.

I have some news, sweet news, for you. I have seen our father once more. I fell asleep for a moment, my head on his knees. How like you he was! Your voice is clear: his was like it, only muffled. And he had but a trace of ashes on his temples.

IVAIN.

You want to make me cry?

AUDE.

No, brother, no. Not one tear—not one. He spoke to me of you, thus: “You think he is a weakling? But do you not remember how strong he became when he wanted to carry me from the bed to the arm-chair or from the arm-chair to the bed, whilst Pierre in a corner, with his back turned, cleansed the morphine syringe? He used to say: ‘Gently, gently, dearest father. Put your arm round my neck; lean well on my shoulder. Do not be frightened. Let yourself go with all your weight.

I am holding you—I am holding you. Do not be afraid of clinging to my neck. Let your legs hang ; let yourself go ; and I can lift you, carry you. You are lighter than yesterday.’”

IVAIN.

Sister, why do you torment me ?

AUDE.

Yes, call me that. I want no other name from you. I want mine to be forgotten. My beloved brother ! My heart overflows when I call you that. Brother ! you are my brother.

IVAIN.

You have no longer a grudge against me, then ?
You forgive me ?

AUDE.

Give me your hands. You, too, if I have said any bitter words to you, you must forgive *me*, too.

IVAIN.

Ah ! I thought I had lost you, and I find you again !

AUDE.

You *must* find me. Never doubt it; be certain that I am waiting for you.

IVAIN.

Where?

AUDE.

I cannot tell you yet. If you knew, you would perhaps run there before me, and I must spare you.

IVAIN.

Sister, poor little sister, why do you wander like this?

AUDE.

You think I am raving? But I have here a thought straighter than a naked blade, sharper than a stiletto. And if I had to compare it to anything I should say that it is worthy of the "Misericordia" with the gold hilt, which belonged to Anthiaume de la Coldre, the Seneschal, and was so precious to our father.

IVAIN.

Who can have stolen it?

AUDE.

I know.

IVAIN.

If that were true, what would I not give to have it back?

AUDE.

What would you do with it? Would you know how to use it, if necessary?

IVAIN.

It is a relic.

AUDE.

Are there no relics that kill? Later on, I want to go with you into that room; I want to touch with you all those relics, to kneel with you on his faldstool, brother and sister, side by side. Are you willing?

IVAIN.

Yes.

AUDE.

There, and there only, was I able to define the thought that rose in me and decide what is right.

IVAIN.

What?

AUDE.

Something must be done.

IVAIN.

What kind of thing?

[He is shaking with anguish.]

AUDE.

A thing that one must either do or undergo.

IVAIN.

Sister, sister, you frighten me. I thought all that was done with.

AUDE.

Is that how you would answer me if I were to call to you—if I were to utter my despairing cry?

IVAIN.

I am afraid to understand; I am at a loss.

AUDE.

You are afraid. Always the same word! Whoever brought us into this world made a grave mistake. It is you who have the soul of a girl, I who have the soul of a man. "Prick your face and besmear it with blood, you white-livered child!" Some one shouted that out, once upon a time, centuries ago.

IVAIN.

What do you want of me? Speak!

[He gets up, pale, quivering. She rises also, on the verge of being carried away by her passion. At that moment, lifting the drapery, LAURENCE DAGON appears.]

AUDE.

No, I must spare you. I can do what you never could. But life, like the guest, will be merciless. Look at our mother! Return thanks to her, Ivain.

IVAIN.

Mother, Aude is not quite well yet.

LAURENCE.

I was coming to ask . . .

AUDE.

It is the hour. Is Monsieur Dagon behind the door? Let him come in.

IVAIN.

Mother, Aude is still agitated.

AUDE.

Do not believe it. I feel rested; I have slept; I am better; I have no more fever. We must hurry. As Helissent said: "Life is rushing onwards."

[Her brother makes a gesture of impatience.]

IVAIN.

Well, well, so be it. One cannot go on living like this.

AUDE.

Is Monsieur Dagon there?

LAURENCE.

He is not there; he is waiting to be called.

[She speaks in a slow, dull voice, with something contracted and fixed in her countenance, as if she bore in herself the fascination of fate invincible.]

AUDE.

Ivain, will you go and tell him? Will you bring him here yourself?

IVAIN.

Very well, I will go.

[He leaves the room, his head bent in anger.]

AUDE.

Really, Mother, you might have brought him in yourself, since you are only here to further destiny.

LAURENCE.

Oh, child, child, I no longer know what is right or what is wrong. I do not know what should be done or what should *not* be done. I have prayed to God without hope; I have probed in my heart without

pity, the misery of years; I have torn the doubts from my mind without being able to kill them. I have drained myself of all the tears that were blinding me, as one's blood is drained in the dust. I have awakened each morning with a start, thinking I have fallen into an unfathomable pit; and at night more than once it has seemed to me that I have fallen again, my eyes wide open, far lower still. Child, child, nothing matters to me, and nothing counts. My eyes must be filled with terror, with the look that knows the inevitable and cannot even turn away its glance. What have I done? What is happening? What other misfortune is preparing? What new disaster? What is this horror that is returning? Must I inflict more suffering? I know no more; I can discern no longer. I do not know what I can do to try to save myself. I do not know what I can do to find myself again. I am suffering intensely in my head and my breast; I am pierced through and through by my own smothered cries; I am torn to pieces and yet am still alive, like the prey abandoned by the satisfied beast. Is an evil going to end? Is an evil going to begin? I beg you—I implore you; yet what words I could hear from you, what help I could hope to receive from your hands, I do not know.

AUDE.

Mother, before you I can but remain silent.

LAURENCE.

I am trembling; I can hardly stand on my feet; it seems as if my bones were giving way. You cannot understand. If he comes in here, if he stays with you, if you talk together, I do not think, I do not believe, that I can stand the strain of waiting. My heart will burst; you cannot understand. It is worse, it is far worse than when as a child they had to operate on you, and I heard, boiling in my own brain, the water in which the surgeon's instruments were being sterilized; and the bed of torture was there with its straps and its wheels, and your poor little face disappeared under the padded mask of ether. *You* do not remember; *you* do not know. But it is much worse—much, much worse.

AUDE.

How? Why? Are you not going to bring in the faultless guest who will convince me of my injustice, force me to bend my head, perhaps to fall on my knees and kiss his hand? Were you not certain of

this? Are you not certain? Are you not sending him to me for an act of absolution and peace?

LAURENCE.

Ah! I am not arguing—I am not discussing—I am trembling. I do not know how I look, but all my life within me is blanched with terror. And just as I have no more tears, I believe I have no more blood. I beg of you—I beg of you. Do not see him; do not speak to him. Abstain, I beg of you! Have pity on me!

AUDE.

And who proposed this to me?—asked it of me?—forced it upon me, even?

LAURENCE.

I have thought better of it. I repent. I am out of my mind. We are all out of our minds. No, it must not be. What good can come of it? It is enough to look at you; enough to breathe this atmosphere, to see this light, to feel that you are living, and all these things living round you. No, it is not possible. I beg of you. I am going away. I will take him with me. You will see us no more—either

of us. This very night I will leave—I will make him leave. Before dawn, before dawn we shall be far away, at the end of the world. I swear it to you.

AUDE.

Mother!

[Her voice, her appearance, reveal such an exhaustion of all her being that the mother shudders as if confronted by another unforeseen terror, by some indefinable monster suddenly springing up there ready to seize her.]

LAURENCE.

What is it?

AUDE.

It is true, then?

LAURENCE.

What?

AUDE.

That which I thought against you, that which I still think against you, that which suddenly bursts forth from your frenzy.

LAURENCE.

What?

AUDE.

That which you acknowledge.

LAURENCE.

What do I acknowledge?

AUDE.

Oh, it is horrible.

[IVAIN raises the curtain and PIERRE DAGON steps into the room. They stay for a moment side by side. LAURENCE turns round as before an apparition which paralyses her. She cannot speak; she does not seem to breathe. The daughter lowers her voice.

Look at them!

[And into her face seems to come back the expression she had in the round hall, when, at the entrance of the guest, she retreated towards the door, that evening in April.

PIERRE DAGON.

Thank you, Aude, for having allowed me to come and see you. How do you feel?

AUDE.

Well, very well. Come in, come in! Sit down!

[The guest takes a few short steps.]

Good-bye, mother; good-bye, Ivain.

[The young man comes towards his mother and accompanies her to the door. Whilst he lifts up the tapestry, she turns round to look at her husband and her daughter, who are standing face to face, and she sees AUDE smile. The hangings drop. They are alone.]

PIERRE DAGON.

You are better, then?

AUDE.

Yes, quite well, father of my soul. Come, come! do not be afraid of crushing the flowers.

PIERRE DAGON.

I shall always crush as few flowers as possible.

AUDE.

Ah, really? Yes, I know. It was the sweet Clariel, the Swallow, who decorated my room as one decks a church for the great festivals. Moreover, this is a great day.

[She still keeps a mocking tone, alternately cold and ardent. Something sharp and bitter is in her; something keen and prompt that gives her the air of a fearless persecutor.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Long desired, long waited for, dear Aude! I cannot tell you how happy I am to be near you, who have been for so long my little wild and loving friend, the little sprite of the hanging gardens who brought me some of the most delightful hours of my life.

[He is circumspect, as one who is groping his way, not knowing yet what means to employ.]

But he keeps his voice in its most natural tones, albeit sometimes too flute-like.

AUDE.

Am I still the same? Do you recognize me? Perhaps a drop of dew still lingers in the palm of each of my hands. Am I the same?

PIERRE DAGON.

Just the same, under this curious reflected light, that reminds me a little of the light shimmering through the maiden-hair fern in the lair of the Old Mandrague, where we used to hear the stalactites playing a little sonata drop by drop as on a tiny organ of blown glass. Do you remember?

AUDE.

What a memory! It is strange, this light. To-day, every one who has come in here has said: "What a weird light!" We are in the depths; we are in a pit. Perhaps, without knowing it, we are like things thrown up by the sea—the wrecked and the drowned.

[She seems to have on her lips a sort of inexorable smile that makes her raillery appear ghastly.]

PIERRE DAGON.

I should like to help you to expel from your mind all sad fancies. I should like to try and cure you, dear Aude.

AUDE.

I know it—I know it! I have on my lips the kind of smile that must resemble one of those bats that are crucified on the doors of the poor. I have it. It is here. I cannot unnaïl it. It fills you with pity. It makes you think I am an innocent, bereft of reason.

PIERRE DAGON.

No, no! What are you saying? It is a very sweet smile, the smile of a misguided child.

AUDE.

Really?

PIERRE DAGON.

It makes me feel tender towards you.

AUDE.

Ah ! I thought it frightened you rather, that it reminded you of another.

PIERRE DAGON.

Another ?

AUDE.

The smile on the lips of your dying friend.

PIERRE DAGON.

My friend ?

AUDE.

Yes, your friend—my father. Was he not the companion of your youth?—the only brother of your soul ?

PIERRE DAGON.

Certainly.

AUDE.

What ? You have not in your voice a spark of love ? You haven't a sigh of regret ?

PIERRE DAGON.

Why should I lessen, by untimely demonstrations, a sentiment kept unblemished within me? What love can stand being measured?

AUDE.

Is that not one of his sayings? I seem to recognize it.

PIERRE DAGON.

I treasure still higher ones.

AUDE.

I have heard him say, too: "Friendship is a gift of life one bestows standing, and that should be received on bended knees."

PIERRE DAGON.

He was worthy of it.

AUDE.

But does one not also receive on bended knees the *coup de grâce*?

PIERRE DAGON.

Aude, I want to talk to you. . . .

AUDE.

Yes, talk to me about him. I must hear you speak of him, and, above all, of that last smile you set on the corners of his mouth, on the clenched jaw which never loosened again. Look at me—look at me. I am imitating him without meaning to.

[She is so entirely obsessed by her father's image that for a few moments she seems to be living through his convulsive agonies.]

PIERRE DAGON.

But what madness is this of yours?

AUDE.

You, too—you, too! Without meaning to do it, you imitate him when asleep.

PIERRE DAGON.

What fiend has got hold of you? Stop, Aude.

AUDE.

I have seen you asleep, and I thought you would sleep no more—that at the end of some white passage

you had killed sleep, like the Thane of Glamis, the Thane of Cawdor.

PIERRE DAGON.

Why do you elude me? Come here, Aude. Give me your two hands.

[Seeing that he is coming towards her, she swerves, avoids him, and steps back to elude his touch.]

AUDE.

“Glamis has murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor shall sleep no more.” But do not tire yourself. You are already panting a little, and your lips are grey as if you had eaten ashes. If some one were to come in he would think we were playing some childish games, like puss-in-the-corner.

PIERRE DAGON.

Enough. Do not prolong this ghastly farce. It is you who feed upon ashes.

AUDE.

Very well. We are two then, you and I? Keep calm and sit down. It does not interest you

to know what shows in your face when you are asleep?

PIERRE DAGON.

Where have you seen me asleep?

AUDE.

Sit down: I will tell you. Out there, on the stone seat, near the sun-dial, in the heat of the day, at the hour of the siesta. You were tired; you were tired from having done too much, and still wanting to do more. You had come to the end of your strength, and you would not acknowledge it. When you were alone you immediately collapsed. I was watching you.

PIERRE DAGON.

You did that?

AUDE.

I thought you were waiting for some prey. But it did not come. The shadow of your head lengthened on the dial that has lost its hand. Nodding a little to the right, a little to the left, it seemed to mark an hour here, an hour there. All hours wound, but only one kills. You know it. At last, your head

sank and marked an hour which I remember. You were dozing—I watched you. You were in my power. I once saw a diver rise suddenly to the surface, having lost his leaden shoes, and looking like a dripping monster. It was like that: that some one rose in your sleep; that other man, that monster living within you. It was horrible; and he was not new to me: I knew him.

[He tries to break the evil spell by a burst of forced hilarity.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Oh, what an ugly story in exchange for all those wonderful ones I used to tell you. You are ungrateful, Aude. But I want to be your healer, as I was then, the interpreter of your thoughts. I must cleanse your imagination by a sun-cure, although (“I am really beginning to be tired of the sun.”) I can see you stretched for hours on the warm stone at the foot of that old dismantled sun-dial.

AUDE.

What a false laugh!

PIERRE DAGON.

How I yearn for your old smile! *It* was not crucified. However, it will come back to you. Give me your hands that I may exorcise you.

AUDE.

In my imagination, I see yours, severed from the arms, reflected in a mirror, in the depths of a mirror.

PIERRE DAGON.

I know that story, too.

AUDE.

Then you know that I had already seen the hideous expression of that man, his shrunken and ghastly look, peering over those two dexterous hands that prepared the needle for the daily injection of morphia prescribed to the patient.

PIERRE DAGON.

Aude, there is nothing here to justify your foolish

excitement. There is no one here to make you keep up that cruel attitude, which, by a perversion, frequent enough at your age, you have forced upon yourself. Do not persist in warping your soul that used to be so sincere. Think of me as a discerning doctor and also as a true friend. We are alone here, we two.

AUDE.

You think we are alone?

PIERRE DAGON.

It seems so to me.

AUDE.

You did not see him enter?

PIERRE DAGON.

Stop playing on my nerves!

AUDE.

He was near you. It was not my brother; it was

he. I said to my mother: "Look at them!" You did not hear? The same force of treason had joined again host to guest.

PIERRE DAGON.

Do not go beyond all bounds, child.

AUDE.

But he is sitting there, with that high forehead dominating all the sadness that hollows his cheeks and emaciates his face. Do not turn away; he is there.

[She has the quiver of hallucination in her eyelids, and the voice of her belief creates a phantom in the dreary glaucous shadow.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Ah! he pities you!

AUDE.

He, standing, bestowed upon you the gift of life. To hasten the end of the one they crucified, they broke his knees. Thus he rises no more.

PIERRE DAGON.

Be silent ! You are odious !

AUDE.

You will always see him. He is there in the midst of your life, with that ineffaceable smile you sculptured on the jaws of stone, there like the statue of that warrior of Ægina, who falls yet smiles for ever. He looks at you ; he is sane ; he understands ; he knows ; he is convinced.

PIERRE DAGON.

Be silent, be silent ! or I will crush you.

[He leaps forward and threatens her. The other, undaunted, fills with agony the stifling air.]

AUDE.

No. Look at him. With a start he throws his head back again and again. He is stiffening, pierced by his suffering. He rises, straightens himself, falls. His breath no longer passes through his clenched

L

teeth. The heart beats once more, stops, becomes empty. You have killed him! Pierre Dagon, you have killed him!

[Beside himself, ghastly and trembling, he springs towards the accuser and seizes her by the wrists, shaking her violently.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Be silent, be silent! I refuse to hear your infamies. You are so mad you should be gagged. Your frenzies will lead you into an asylum. We have, your mother and I, enough authority still to enforce the necessary measure. There is no other way of bringing back to reason a sullen and fierce slanderer, her own and every one else's enemy, henceforth unworthy of compassion. You hear me? I order you to be silent.

[She frees herself fiercely.]

AUDE.

You have almost sprained my wrists. You are a coward; but do not imagine that I shall faint. You are lost. You can never assume again the mask of

a skilful tempter. You will have henceforth the face of the other, until the hour of death—the face of the murderer.

PIERRE DAGON.

But, madwoman, where is your proof? The shadow even of a proof? At least, a clue?

AUDE.

A testimony.

PIERRE DAGON.

That of your delirium.

AUDE.

That of my soul was sufficient. For, through the soul alone, I had discovered the truth.

PIERRE DAGON.

Out of an impure dream you had fashioned an abominable lie.

AUDE.

From the first evening of our return, when the

first lamp was lit, the soul of this house was alight with this truth, alight from the depth of the tomb to the height of the roof, as though to herald a resurrection.

PIERRE DAGON.

And is that sufficient?

AUDE.

No, that is not sufficient. When the act loomed before us as though it had just been committed, an irrefutable witness acknowledged it.

PIERRE DAGON.

A new ghost?

AUDE.

A living flesh, a living conscience, who, from a feeling of humanity, had wished to attenuate certainty into doubt, so as to be able to keep the secret and avoid the horror of a denunciation. I sought for it; I probed it; I forced it to answer, to testify, to confirm the inner proof by the manifest one.

PIERRE DAGON.

Who?

AUDE.

You ask that? I did not think you could become more ghastly pale than you were. The doctor . . . Maclaine, Christian Maclaine . . . a few hours ago he was here; and my suffering was his suffering.

[He lets himself drop on a chair as though plunged into a dark void. The last word of his defence is listless, uttered almost in a dream.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Yes: delirium is contagious.

AUDE.

There is a poison that resists even putrefaction, and that could be found intact in the nameless thing, after three years of secrecy. It is the incorruptible seed of hospitality. It would perhaps serve again. . . . Has that occurred to you?

[He is entirely absorbed in his engrossing thought. She comes near and leans a little towards him, pitiless, looking at his hands that he has laid on his knees.]

You no longer see. Your eyes have lost their sight. May cowardice thus brand those criminal hands and tear them from your wrists, and let them drop to earth, with the resolution stamped on them which I can read as plainly as their lines and their veins. . . .

[He starts forward full of revolt, his fists clenched.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Ah, no! They are still so powerful that they would know how to curb your hatred and your pride, as they knew how to show to your delusion the path that should have led you back to yourself, in deeds of life, in efforts for salvation!

AUDE.

The vanquished is rising again?

PIERRE DAGON.

I am not vanquished, and I have no need to rise

again, for I have never been so confident in myself for my vigil during the storm. My courage can reflect my action without wavering and without growing pale.

AUDE.

You could not have grown more pale even in death.

PIERRE DAGON.

I do not speak of my poor face, but of my silent courage, to which you have opposed your morbid agitation, and a phantom born of your real suffering, to which I am not insensitive. Here, in this secluded room, almost warm with tears, in this very home of your delirium and your martyrdom, where a man's heart cannot help feeling compassion and regret . . .

AUDE.

Neither compassion nor regret. I have fought the good fight, without weakness, without cowardice.

PIERRE DAGON.

And it is not I who will commit an act of cowardice towards my action, even if I did grow pale before the deformed and debased image of my act. Do you believe, can you believe, that I obeyed a feeling of fear or of shame in disputing with you my secret? Do you think that my obstinate denials, that my smiling dissimulation, that my violence even, attempted to hide an ignominious fault and elude the stamp of infamy? Do you know me as the kind of man who, after having once dared, tries to shun danger with the subterfuges and wiles of a miserable scoundrel? Am I one to trouble myself to find the right word and gesture, drawing in my claws, to gain a restful impunity? You have discovered that being within me, that other who hides in me. Not one only, but a thousand—not one soul but a thousand souls; and monsters also, a burden of different and antagonistic forces, sometimes overwhelming. Such is the man of flesh and fate, such a man am I, living among so many blind spectres. And I looked at him and I listened to him, that other, that stranger, here just now, whilst he was playing that ghastly game with you, whilst he avoided your attack and shunned your persecution; and I gazed

upon him with a sadness far more bitter than your raillery. To fill the measure of his humiliation one thing only was wanting: that you should have lent him one of your dresses and that he should have sobbed at your feet like a whimpering girl. The murderer who confesses and repents in the virginal room, his neck under the avenging heel! Do you think I look that sort of man? Tell me.

AUDE.

Perhaps, being more cowardly, you preferred to seize me by the wrists and twist them.

PIERRE DAGON.

Yes—I beg your pardon, I beg a thousand pardons—because I could no longer restrain my impatience at that cruel provocation, at that useless and sinister game. I hoped to frighten you, to subdue you, and to succeed in still keeping my secret from all profanation.

AUDE.

Profanation, do you say?

PIERRE DAGON.

I do. You who pretend to be a being raised by suffering into a pure spirit, and yet can see nothing beyond little material signs, you who live encased in the frame of that gloomy mirror, fascinated by two ghastly hands and a bowed face, you who wish to stir cold ashes to find in them an incorruptible seed, do you know this proud sentence of a murderer? "If this is a crime, I wish that all my virtues should kneel before my crime."

AUDE.

That was the voice of a rebellious hero.

PIERRE DAGON.

What do you know of heroism except its conventional forms and its plausible images? There is another sense, more profound than sight or hearing. There is a beauty in every action, even in the most sombre. There are unwonted sacrifices that neither your reason nor your faith can attain. In friendship as in love, the gift of death is sometimes equal to the gift of life. You who accuse, you who judge, could you

understand? Would you know how to fathom my enigma as I know how to interpret your dreams? Poor, naïve child, always there on the watch to spy into all the crevices of my soul and to fashion from each of my words a weapon to open my heart!

AUDE.

I will open it.

PIERRE DAGON.

And after? He alone could read in it who had reached the depth of sin and suffering, the zenith of will and beauty.

AUDE.

You have destroyed all,

PIERRE DAGON.

I have exalted all. Did I not even attempt to raise you above yourself?

AUDE.

You weighed on me with all your perverse forces.

PIERRE DAGON.

If it were a yoke, you seemed to wear it like wings.

AUDE.

I still bear the trace of it, and have wept in vain to obliterate it.

PIERRE DAGON.

How many times, when weeping, did you ask me the wherefore of your tears? What has become of the tears, known only to you, that Clariel has not learnt? You used to say to me with the fervour of a martyr: "You do not know what one suffers." I answered: "I know." And I thought to become part of your suffering, like that brother who for sole answer laid himself down on the burning rack beside the tortured one. But what do you do in exchange to-day, for me—unless it be to disown me, humble me, disgrace me? I am tired, you have already said, of having done too much. More often I have given, and lost what I gave.

AUDE.

I recognize the art of the insidious fiend. But no, I have no pity for you, none for myself, none for others. To destroy in me the remembrance of what was, I should be dead already if I had not imposed upon myself the hard task of living to accomplish my vow. I have thrown everything on to the funeral pile, and I can at last put on my white robe. In vain you still attempt to destroy by words, what is unchangeable. You are charged and convicted, Pierre Dagon. You are judged and condemned.

PIERRE DAGON.

I alone can judge and condemn myself. He who after hard fighting succeeds in mastering himself, considers as his privilege the right to punish or pardon himself, and I yield it to no other. If all my actions are worth to me what they have cost me, none is more valuable to me than the one you pervert—the frenzy of murder or the intoxication of sacrifice. If I look within myself, in the horror even of my silence, I do not feel belittled. I feel, on the contrary, my demon growing there, where

my torture gnaws within me. There are depths from which stars are born.

AUDE.

I will bear mine in my hand this evening, like a fiery brand—and yours?

PIERRE DAGON

I wait until a new one is born of it.

AUDE.

Of a new horror, or of death?

PIERRE DAGON.

What is death? “Do you really believe one can die?” That is the question on which you have shown such extraordinary anxiety.

AUDE.

“One can kill.” That is the answer of the traitor

who sacrifices. But if we both had to die now, could you still lie to me?

PIERRE DAGON.

What use could there be in lying? And what could happen to me that is not already on my conscience?

AUDE.

Then let your conscience set up before my passion the true image of your act. Why did you kill? How did you kill? Strip yourself of all lies and all cunning, as if your moment had come, and I had already put on my white robe. I order you to speak. I order you to be yourself before the inexorable opponent.

[She leans towards him, quivering with menace and expectation, like a tortured flame. The man seems for a moment to vacillate on the edge of his mystery.]

The shadow takes possession of your face and your hands.

[He shivers and steps back suddenly, convulsed by his strong pride.]

PIERRE DAGON.

No. This is the secret of the soul and a sacred pledge. I still wish to remain alone with it and my contempt, to measure my height and to prepare myself for a greater and freer solitude. Of my bonds I have not made roots. I am the master of my life and my death.

AUDE.

Beware. No one is master of his life nor of his death.

PIERRE DAGON.

Oh, child, and what matters life, what matters death? And what can I fear hereafter, in this world or beyond?

AUDE.

Take care. I have a commandment within myself that I must obey.

PIERRE DAGON.

Go and pray !

AUDE.

I have offered my last prayer on that smouldering tomb.

PIERRE DAGON.

A flame may spring forth from it during the night. Good-bye.

[As he turns towards the door, disdainful and gloomy, AUDE raises her hand with a gesture of menace and self-dedication.]

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: *A quadrangular stone terrace, encircled with a balustrade, without vases or statues, like narrow lists, bare and solitary, close to the ancient cypresses of the "Ténébree." It is reached by three steps from a long landing leading on one side to a staircase going down to the lower terrace, and on the other to the staircase going up to the upper terrace, which projects into the sky like the prow of a ship. A great arched vault unites the two smooth stone doors opening on the two handrails, which are simple and strong, made of a single band with a moulding, with something of austere Doric simplicity.*

Through the opening of the arches is seen the glimmering of the west, behind the trunks of cypresses of unequal heights, set in rows like the pipes of a great bronze organ. In the masses of their perennial verdure, the venerable branches are more twisted and more entangled than their lowest roots.

The flaming light of evening pervades it mysteriously, reddening the hopeless depths, like live coals covered with sombre scales.

The stone terrace is silent and deserted. AUDE'S voice is heard on the staircase leading down from the upper terrace.

THE VOICE OF AUDE.

Good-bye, good-bye, Swallow! Good-bye, Clariel!

[The voice of THE SWALLOW is heard answering from below, clear and fresh, whilst her companion steps on to the threshold, crosses the landing, goes up the three steps, runs to the balustrade and leans forward to wave once again. She wears her white robe and her sandals.]

THE VOICE OF THE SWALLOW.

Good-night, Aude, good-night. Until to-morrow, to-morrow early. I shall be there for Mass. I will not fail. I will bring you lilies from Sormarin, a big bunch.'

AUDE.

Good-bye, sweet little Clariel! Be happy, be happy! Do not forget your Audain.

THE VOICE OF THE SWALLOW.

Good-night! Good-night! Sleep, sleep well, this night. Go soon to bed. I want you to sleep. Do you hear, Aude?

AUDE.

I will sleep, I will sleep.

THE VOICE OF THE SWALLOW.

And awaken with a face "made of a rose."

AUDE.

I will, I will.

THE VOICE OF THE SWALLOW.

I cannot see you any more. Lean forward.

AUDE.

Good-bye!

THE VOICE OF THE SWALLOW.

Ah! Audain! Audain! Look, look at the happy

omen! Raise your head. The crescent is on your left; on your left, the new moon!

[AUDE raises her head and looks at the sky.

Good-night! Good-night!

[The voice disappears. AUDE leans farther forward.]

AUDE.

Good-bye! Good-bye!

[The mother appears at the door of the staircase that leads up from the lower terrace. She is gasping, almost unrecognizable, disfigured by despair. ♦

LAURENCE DAGON.

Aude!

[The girl shudders at the unexpected call, and turns round. The mother rushes towards her, gasping.

At last I find you! Why did you go away? Why did you leave me like that? I looked for you everywhere. How is it I did not fall stricken on the way? Child, child, help me! I am exhausted.

[She drops on the stone seat as if she were going to faint.

AUDE.

Ah! Mother, why must you be terrible to me to the end? How can I help you? What can I still say to you? Yes, I ran away because I know how to be strong, but I become weak in your presence. Since the day when my thoughts were against you, I have thrust you from me. Now doubt has become a certainty. And you do not even think of vindicating yourself. And it is I who have to run away, and you pursue me; whilst, if I were you, I would wish to find myself already at the end of the world.

LAURENCE.

I am at the end of my despair. I am neither living nor dead. And I, who brought you into this world, I conceive now the inconceivable, the joy of not being born. If I look for you, if I pursue you, it is to tell you that what you think against me surpasses treason, exceeds murder. . . .

AUDE.

Unhappy woman!

LAURENCE.

I did not understand. The first time, there, in your room, a few hours ago, centuries ago, when I begged you not to see him, not to talk to him, really, I had not understood. I swear to you. You said: "Is it true what you acknowledge? is it true what you confess?" I did not know what; I could not imagine what. My mind was a blank; my brain was a whirl. I saw you distorted as in a nightmare. I saw your lips moving, and the words that I heard had no meaning. Already the whole of my life was petrified in the terror of a conjecture, but I could not grasp this new atrocity. I swear to you. I did not understand, nor did I the second time. I was overwhelmed by the blow—prostrated. The words you said to me I heard as in a turmoil, as in a thunderstorm. What could I answer? Perhaps you went away so as not to trample on me. . . .

AUDE.

Ah! spare me!

LAURENCE.

I regained control of myself. I rose, excess of suffering quells suffering, and again I heard within

me those obscure words, and their meaning flashed suddenly across me. I know now. You accuse me of being his accomplice, of having known and furthered his design, of having helped him to kill . . .

AUDE.

I cannot listen to you. If you continue, I shall let myself fall down . . . there.

[AUDE leans on the balustrade, her hands on the rail, tense, impatient, and wild.]

LAURENCE.

No, you shall listen, you shall answer. That is what you think? That is what you imply?

AUDE.

Yes.

[The mother reels as if, wounded in the heart, she was going to collapse on the flagstones. AUDE makes an instinctive movement to support her, but, seeing that she remains standing, she hesitates and refrains from touching her. The mother's voice is now like that of those heroic wounded whose courage alone enables them to breathe.]

LAURENCE.

I see it now. It is not doubt, [it is certainty. Henceforth there remains only death. For just now you looked at me as if to decide on the force of your blow, and, although you thought me on the verge of falling, you were careful not to come near or touch me, so loathsome am I to you.

AUDE.

God! Oh, God! But what do you expect me to do? Do you wish me to implore your pardon? Kiss your hands? Am I in one world and you in another? Do I speak another language? Does truth exist or not exist? Is it true or not true, that which has been committed? A few moments ago the vilest crime had become a heroic sacrifice. And now you reproach me for not having clasped you in my arms.

LAURENCE.

No, no, you are mistaken. I do not attempt to save myself. I do not wish to be saved. I will not see the light of to-morrow. I do not think my misery could bear it, just as you do not dream that your hatred could give you back what you have lost.

Already, far more than half of me is plunged in darkness. Listen to me, since it is through my poor body, through my miserable flesh that life comes to you. My body counts no longer. It is dead. I rise from my flesh as from a stretcher. My soul alone is before you, and it hides nothing from you. Listen! I did not do what you think. I am wretched, half-mad; I have in me and behind me every misery, every error; but I am not sullied . . . by that infamy.

AUDE.

May God give me grace to believe you, before I die! That is my last prayer.

LAURENCE.

Believe me, believe me! Do you not hear my cry of anguish? For one moment let your heart soften; break the hardness that surrounds it! I take all on myself, but not that. I sinned through passion, but not through iniquity. I am lost to you, but I am not lost to myself. Your covert and insistent accusation I took at first for a delusion, for a form of delirium. Then I began to tremble, without daring to realize it. And now I

am dying of it. But I was ignorant of all. I had no suspicion, then or later. Nothing was confided or confessed to me. And with what could they reproach me if during the ordeal my solicitude never relaxed for one hour, if I had the strength to fulfil my duty until the end?

AUDE.

Do not say that, do not say that, or else everything will be at an end. How should I believe you, if you show that you have forgotten all the evil?

LAURENCE.

In what did I fail, then?

AUDE.

You forget! You forget! And you ask of me an act of faith? I beg of you, I beg of you, leave me alone to my night. Look, now the windows are being opened. Let me guard my silence with a hand on my mouth.

LAURENCE.

I cannot. This hour will never come back to us again.

AUDE.

I had purified myself. Do you see? I have on my white robe and a commandment within me which I must obey. I had repeated the Holy words: "Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Must I drain it?

LAURENCE.

I must drink my share—the dregs.

AUDE.

Let it be so. You gave me eyes too large, and you forgot to put in my blood the gift of forgetfulness. In defending yourself, you tried previously to show yourself irreproachable unto the end, faithful before death although unfaithful after. You try still, miserable woman, and yet you say your whole soul is bared to me!

[The mother is bewildered, loses all self-control, shaken by a trembling that seems to prostrate her. Her voice dies away.]

LAURENCE.

Is it not?

AUDE.

I have breathed in a flame. You have made me breathe in a horrible flame. . . .

LAURENCE.

Oh, God! Oh, God!

AUDE.

Do you believe, or rather, do you expect *me* to believe, that he turned his face to the wall, without seeing, without knowing, ignorant of all? But the lightest of your steps round the bed made him suffer more than if you had walked on his breast with feet of fire.

LAURENCE.

Ah! what have I done?

AUDE.

Even before, before being chained to the bed by that dreadful illness, some evenings, when he was alone with me, he would clasp me suddenly in his arms with a despair that, for me, plunged the earth in darkness and obscured the whole future. He did

not speak, but he strained me closer to him. And I felt his tears drop heavy on my hair. . . . Ah, ten years of misery could not have aged me as much as one of those drops. When we came back to the house, I seemed to return from the depths of I know not what disaster, faded, withered, without youth. What other garland could I have worn after? They are here, those tears—they are all here, hardened, polished; they have become diamonds that cut.

LAURENCE.

I did not know. I did not know.

AUDE.

You did not know that he loved you, that he loved you so much?—that he had buried in you the roots of his life?—that he looked on you as his companion and his creation, his dream and his work?

LAURENCE.

Oh, stop!

AUDE.

You did not know that he loved you as my brother

loves his wife to-day? For my brother, your son, loves his wife with all his life, past recovery. There, in my room, before you came in, I felt his great heart quivering in the shadows I created to test him. "Ah, no, no!" he faltered. "I would cease to exist, I would die." And that which was done to his father will be done to him, and it is you who have prepared it—willed it.

LAURENCE.

It is not true, it is not true! No, no! It is impossible that that should be true. Oh, God! Oh, God! What must I do? To die is not sufficient.

AUDE.

No, to die is *not* sufficient.

LAURENCE.

Cruel child, creature born of anguish and fury, how I shrieked, in what mortal terror, in what agony I gasped when they tore you from my womb! And now I seem to beget you once again of my torture.

AUDE.

One has seen mothers rocking coffins.

LAURENCE.

But none bearing so heavy a heart. You were within me, you lived within me, more secret than the heart, sweeter than milk. At times, as I sat, I felt you fluttering within me, like a vein of happiness; as I sat there, not thinking, almost drowsing, with the sun on my eyelids. . . . You were born of me, you have wept, you have smiled. And now you are there, the same, being of my flesh; you are there, tall, obscure, hostile, burdened with fate, filled with horrible thoughts, filled with thoughts that you know and that I do not know, cleverer than I, perhaps even sadder than I, now that, all at once, I have become old, now that I have nothing left, that no one loves me any more, that I have done all this wrong. . . . My child, my child, tell me it is not true.

AUDE.

You still wish to shut your eyes!—still wish to

delude and to spare yourself ! You must know everything.

LAURENCE.

You are sure of it ? Of what are you sure ? Up to what point ?

[The words burn her lips, though she whispers them. The girl turns her head away and covers her face with her hands.]

Yes, for you to be able to speak to me like that, for me to dare to question you, you must indeed have wrenched me from you. There can be no longer any tie between us, any restraint, anything unsullied, nor anything pure, nor have we even enough blood in our veins to be able to blush with shame. But tell me . . .

AUDE.

May God heal my eyes before He seals them !

LAURENCE.

Is that possible ? If I tried to come back, if I begged, if I humbled myself, I did it with the hope of winning you back to me, and for the good of my son, for the love of my child, so dear to me, so

gentle; who has never caused me sorrow, who has never suspected or disowned me. And now it is I, myself, who bring unhappiness to him in the house he has regained, who cast an evil spell over him; I who bring back the enemy, who deliver him into the hands of the enemy. . . . Ah! is it possible? Tell me, tell me! I am lost and you are sinking, but I must save my son—you must save your brother. You and I, are we not ready to give up everything for him?

[A prelude is heard rising from the organ in the chapel below. An extraordinary emotion illumines the face of the avenger.]

AUDE.

Listen! Listen!

[The deep chords seem to rise amidst the black cypresses that quiver from root to tree-top.]

Who speaks? Whose voice is that? It chills my bones.

LAURENCE.

I am frozen.

[In the mystical evening sky the solemn harmonies seem to exalt the grandeur of the]

funereal trees. Each tree-top rises like a supplication towards the presage of the first star.

AUDE.

One thing alone lives, in the night, one alone—this tomb. It is not a stone, it is a spirit. Do you not feel the cypresses swaying, the stones vibrating under our feet?

LAURENCE.

What a radiance is on your countenance! How white your dress is! Aude! Sacrifice me!

[She goes towards the maiden, as if to offer herself.]

AUDE.

No, I do not want you to touch me.

LAURENCE.

I swear to you, I swear to you that I am not what you think me.

AUDE.

Mother, go and pray.

LAURENCE.

I swear to you, I did not know. Ah! I did not know I had given my soul to a murderer.

AUDE.

Leave me. I cannot waste my vigil. Leave me alone. The time has come. Go and pray.

[The prelude ceases. The swell of the last chord rises amidst the cypresses and dies away. There is a great silence.]

LAURENCE.

I hold myself guilty of all wrong, and I am ready to expiate in every way, with my whole being, in this life and in death, and beyond; but of the infamy of which you accuse me I am innocent. Come! The murderer himself will tell you that.

AUDE

Do not touch me. I refuse to hear any more, to know any more.

LAURENCE.

You must come with me, to find them. You must not refuse to hear the truth.

AUDE.

I do not believe any more, I cannot believe any more. Everything is treachery; everything is falsehood. Let go of me! Leave me alone! Why do you desecrate me?

[The mother feels under her hand something like a weapon, hidden in the folds of the white robe, near the girdle.]

LAURENCE.

What have you here?

AUDE.

You search me? I won't have it. I won't have it.

[She resists and makes desperate efforts to free herself.]

LAURENCE.

Aude, Aude, what have you there? What are you hiding?

AUDE.

I will not be searched. Let me go! Be careful. Do not provoke me beyond endurance.

[But the mother persists. She has already caught hold of the weapon and tries to force it from her.]

LAURENCE.

Ah! It is "the stiletto of Anthiaume," it is the "Misericordia." How did you get it? Why do you wear it? What do you want to do? Give it to me!

AUDE.

No, no. Take care!

LAURENCE.

Let go of it, Aude!

AUDE.

No!

[They wrestle, gasping, the one choked by anguish, the other by rage.]

Stop! stop! or I will bite your hand . . . or I do not know what I shall do! Ah!

[The mother has succeeded in tearing the weapon from her; and she leaps back grasping it in her hand. They both gasp, but the daughter is disfigured by a wild fury, leaning against the balustrade, all white against the black of the cypresses.]

LAURENCE.

Aude, my child, what were you going to do?

[She speaks in a low tone, her jaw trembling, terrified at the sight of this uncontrollable fury.]

AUDE.

If you do not give me back that weapon this in-

stant, I will throw myself over head foremost. Put it down and go.

[Her palms on the rail, her arms stiffened, her chin raised, her eyes glittering, she bends over and leans towards the void, ready to throw herself down with such a violent resolution in her threatening gesture that her mother stoops, stretches out her hand, takes a few steps, doubled up as if crouching on the flag-stones, and puts down the "Misericordia" with the hilt of gold.]

[She has not yet withdrawn her hand nor risen, nor has the daughter changed her attitude, when a step is heard on the staircase to the right, and PIERRE DAGON appears on the threshold.]

[He seems to be coming to meet some one, and at first does not discover the presence of his wife and her companion on the terrace, already darkened by the gloom of the cypresses. He calls in a low voice, and advances, hesitating.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Helissent! Helissent!

[The wife rises promptly and puts her foot on the weapon lying on the ground, hiding it. Standing thus, she waits in silence.]

[As PIERRE DAGON is coming up the steps, the darkness of the twilight deceives him again, and, for the third time, he repeats the name.]

Helissent !

[On discovering his wife on the terrace he gives a sudden start and stops.]

LAURENCE.

Helissent is not here. There is none but myself and my daughter. We were coming to look for you.

PIERRE DAGON.

Here I am.

[He has already gathered up his whole strength, knowing that the hour for the last struggle has come.]

LAURENCE.

God has granted that my daughter should be my

witness in this hour. God has granted that a faint shadow should envelop this horror, and cast a veil over an inhuman countenance that I should not have been able to look upon in the light of day without being blinded.

[No violence is in her voice, but a gravity which seems to give to each one of her words the weight of blood and of tears.]

PIERRE DAGON.

I have feared also, in spite of being by far the stronger. I have also trembled with pity, and, I confess, I have longed for a reprieve. But I did not think to have such a witness to a supreme interview that filial passion can neither listen to nor endure. I refuse to submit to any judge, whoever he may be, unless it be to Love, with far-seeing eyes. I have said so already. But you shall not judge me. One does not judge the destiny that forges us, nor the hardness of its anvil, nor the cruelty of its hammer. The tree does not judge the fire that devours it. And, if a terrible act has been committed, you also were weighed down under the necessity that willed it.

LAURENCE.

No ambiguous words; no double meaning! Truth, simple truth. I, too, am accused. Before these fixed eyes that look at us from the depths of eternity, I am the accomplice, I knew of the scheme, I upheld the criminal hand, I have lived beside the murderer, I have brought him back here to renew the infamy, I have delivered into his clutches another prey, I have prepared another ruin. That is the accusation. These pitiless eyes repeat it.

If I find favour for having given the best of myself without measure, without ceasing, if I find favour for having loved, and served love beyond doubt or hope, if such blindness in believing, such ardour in obeying, so intense an effort in conquering myself counts at least for something—if the sudden shattering of all that was my reason for living entitles me to anything, then I implore you to tell the truth before this witness of my blood and of my spirit.

PIERRE DAGON.

My poor wife, this shadow cannot help us. Even death would be too light. And what should I

want, what could I do, but veil myself to go down into the silence that effaces and absolves all? There is a soul for ever unfathomable, a secret that can only be given and received from equal to equal, a power older than necessity and time, and greater than to-morrow. I am not suffering the last agony, but I will hasten death. What can you do with me that will pacify you? Aude, how white your robe is on the threshold of this your night! You predicted me this “. . . Vengeance with the wings of a dove!”

[From the chapel below the harmonies of the organ rise anew and, as if they were conducted by the vibrations of the cypresses, spread themselves from peak to peak towards the hyacinth sky.]

LAURENCE.

Listen! I also know it, now. I feel it. One thing alone is alive—that tomb out there, which is reopening. I know it now. Where the tomb is, there is the resurrection. The father and the son are out there, one life in each chord, one grief in each harmony, and the one throbs in the other, the one is

revealed in the other. I feel the flag-stones vibrating under my feet. And look, look at the heartrending expression on that speechless face! What have you done? What have you done? How did you kill? Why did you kill? Speak!

[PIERRE DAGON is standing. In a sort of religious exaltation he looks around him, towards the sky, towards the trees, towards the stone, towards the motionless creature, towards his gasping wife. His voice quivers at first with the most profound anguish.

PIERRE DAGON.

If his spirit is present, if that immensity which fills the twilight is his all-seeing soul, if even my anguish warns me that he is near, I ask him to absolve me from the sin I am about to commit in revealing the secret which he bound me by an oath to keep.

Yes, Aude, he was the companion of my youth, the brother of my soul. The gift of life was received on bended knee, and that life was blessed. Capable of every kindness, who owned a heart more virile? At times our friendship was a strife, and at times it was a creation. Neither of us measured what he bestowed

or what he received. He gives me now the courage to speak of the terrible thing before the being who was as the sovereign flower of his melancholy. But just now, without meaning to, did I not crush the "flower of Tristan"? Whosoever breaks it off, kills it. And what have I done?

One can live for years near a human soul without seeing it. One day, behold, the eyes look up and see it. Suddenly, one knows not why, something bursts like a dam between two streams. And two lives blend, mingle, and rush onwards. It was so with us. Laurence, my wife, I have loved you. Do not forget that!

[As if her feet were frozen to the flag-stones and compelled to terrifying immobility, LAURENCE is like the cypresses, which shiver continuously to the music of death and the breeze of the evening.]

[The husband becomes more and more exalted.]

I can see his eyes again. They look at me once more. They are yours, Aude; they have opened again in you. There is his look behind your look. What could my life hide from him? His had a new-born smile that one could not look at without melting into tears.

Our silences were more transparent than our thoughts. The unforeseen fatality was above us like a ruthless sun. And, to make it more atrocious still, illness held the suffering body struggling against the inevitable calamity.

The clouds that encumber us are sometimes dispersed by the wind. Our anguish when expressed is rendered less acute. But here four blind walls enclosed the lurid battle.

A dumb certainty lived on that lifeless pillow, and he said to me one day, feeling sure of me: "Friend, it is necessary that one of us should die. What is, is irrevocable. I feel that the end is near, but if I am to forgive you, you must hasten it. I have that with which to put an end to myself, a weapon sure and beautiful, handed down from my ancestors. It is almost as sharp as your needle, my 'Misericordia of Anthiaume.' But it is useless to me. No one must guess, no one must know. You must contrive somehow this evening that the injection of morphia shall be deadly . . . so, as I gave all to you, you will have given all to me. You owe me that, you owe it to me. Those are the only terms between equals. Those are the terms I impose on you. I know no others nobler."

Ah! what worse thing could a man's heart have to face? And what have I to fear henceforth in this world and beyond? Why should I quail? "May your hand not shake! May your wrist be steady!" He spoke thus. His heroic will seemed to cut each word like an invincible diamond. As he looked into my eyes, his will became my will, and repressed in me every human impulse, all compassion for himself and for myself, the horror of our strength, and my faintness before that sacrifice which was beyond friendship and love, higher than life, deeper than death.

"If you do not wish my blood to be upon you and upon her who loves you and whom you are taking from me, deliver me from my despair. And it will be but a drop—not even that, perhaps! Hasten destiny! Oh, my friend, be my dearest enemy. You will never have been closer to my heart. It is the gift of death, more regal than the other. I wish it."

Ah! these ghastly murderer's hands that you thought you discovered in the degrading mirror, and this colourless face bent over the abominable deceit!

I took my life, with the anguish, the love, the crime, the remorse, with the weight of all the years

and all the sufferings, with beauty and shame, with falsehood and truth ; I have taken it with these two hands of man, and I have uplifted it there from whence the soul can descend no more. What do you want of me ?

[Strained, trembling, aglow, AUDE had followed the confession without a quiver of her eyelids. She rushes forward with a frenzied yell.]

AUDE.

Ah ! a torrent in exchange for that drop.

[AUDE bends and glides to the feet of her mother as if to pick up the weapon. But the mother seizes her by the arm and stays her with an overwhelming strength.]

LAURENCE.

Child, child, look ! My love, my passion, my ruin, all myself, look, I offer to you. And to you, my son.

[Impetuously she waves AUDE aside, she bends down, takes from under her foot the weapon,

and rushes towards the man to strike him.

PIERRE DAGON.

Whom do you avenge?

[He has not flinched, nor made a gesture; but he looks at his wife, who, under that gaze, seems for an instant to reel and hesitate. Fiercely, AUDE urges her.]

AUDE.

Strike! Strike!

LAURENCE.

Love.

[She has answered in a low voice, striking the man in the breast and leaving the dagger in the wound. She leaps back, distraught, and watches him stagger.]

PIERRE DAGON.

Friend, brother, you see me.

[With a superhuman effort he holds back his spirit, and he seems to grow taller. The

shadow of the cypresses broods over his agony. The swell of the organ spreads to the flag-stones upon which he is about to fall.

I have repeated your words, and they have stained me with blood. . . . Sacrificed, I return to you. . . . May my soul have the strength to lead my body to your tomb! You used to say: "One must have the courage of the eagle, the courage of the self-contained. . . ." Our day is beginning. No one knows, no one understands. These poor perplexed women. . . . I will seek the spark of a god in your ashes. . . . I want . . . I want to come to you . . . all alone . . .

[He makes a few staggering movements, and sets his foot on the edge of the first step. Death clutches at him, ties his tongue. He sinks down and rolls almost to the threshold of the door by which he entered. His wife has fallen upon her knees, as if struck down by terror, incapable of going to him, powerless even to drag herself along.]

LAURENCE.

I love you, I love you! There, where you are, there shall I be,

[She holds out her arms despairingly, then falls back. AUDE leans over her with a movement of pity and anguish.]

AUDE.

Mother, mother, I kiss your hand! This hand—I kiss it.

[On the staircase is heard the anxious voice of HELISSENT DE LA COLDRE.]

THE VOICE OF HELISSENT.

Aude! Aude! Who screamed? I heard some one scream. Aude, where are you? Who is there?

[AUDE runs towards the corpse, takes from round her neck the long white scarf and covers the motionless face; then she draws the stiletto from the wound.]

[HELISSENT appears on the threshold; and, at the first step, she almost falls against the body lying across it, lifeless. She bends over him, touches him, feels him, withdraws her hands, shivering, ghastly white.]

HELISSENT.

Ah! it is blood! Who has killed him?

[LAURENCE DAGON rises from her stupor, with the look of those souls who answer the call of the last Judgment.

[But AUDE, showing in her hand the blood-stained "*Misericordia*," shrieks out her vengeance.

AUDE.

It is I, it is I who killed him, with this, to avenge the dead and the living.

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